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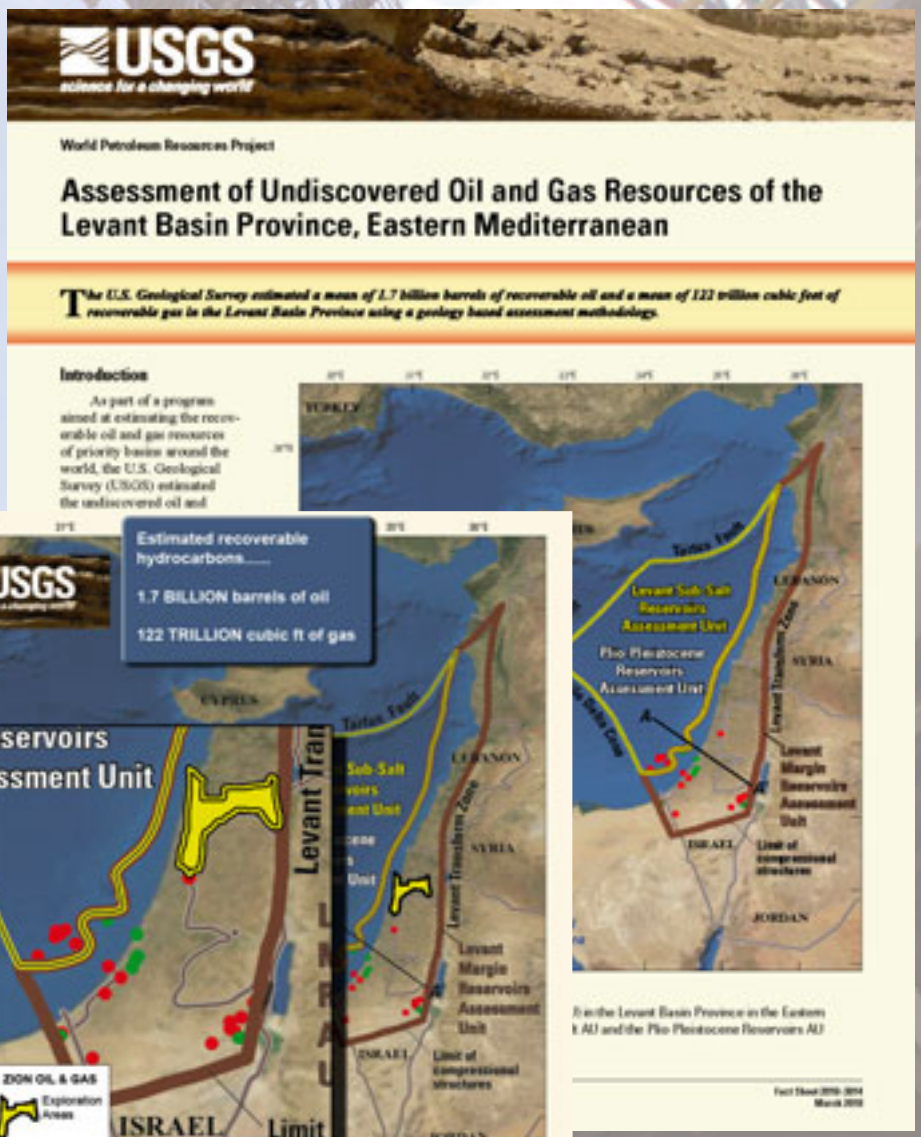

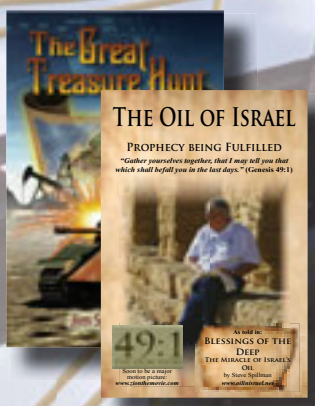

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A Hip Check, Not a Fact Check

There is a widespread misapprehension that news organizations are never more evenhanded and punctilious than when they label one of their stories a "Fact Check." To the contrary, with a handful of honorable exceptions, few articles are as one-sided, biased, and overtly editorializing as those labeled "Fact Check."

It is precisely when news organizations are itching to take sides that they resort to a "fact check" story—a format that, ironically, liberates them from the usual constraints of conveying both sides of a dispute and frees them to accuse politicians and others they dislike of deception and dishonesty.

As we noted on this page last fall, it was not a disinterested devotion to the truth that led the Associated Press to assign 11 reporters to "fact check" Sarah Palin's book *Going Rogue*—a level of scrutiny never before applied to a politician's memoir. And by the way, don't waste your time looking for AP's "fact check" of either of Barack Obama's memoirs.

Last week, the AP was at it again, with a ludicrously biased "fact check" of the Ground Zero mosque story. Here's the lede:

> A New York imam and his proposed mosque near ground zero are being demonized by political candidates—mostly Republicans—despite the fact that Islam is already very much a part of the World Trade Center neighborhood. And that Muslims pray inside the Pentagon, too, less than 80 feet from where terrorists attacked.

Scrapbook friend Mollie Hemingway had good advice for the wire service at the Getreligion blog: "Just a word to the wise, folks. When composing something that you're trying to pass off as an independent judgment of 'facts,' lay off the non sequiturs, politicking, loaded phrases, red herrings, and unsubstantiated statements. Or move them lower than the first paragraph, at least! I'm still shaking my head over the use of the term 'demonized' in a so-called fact check." ♦

The Creeping Politicization of Everything

Scrapbook reader Scott Barlow writes:

> As a thirty-eight-year-old man, I am a bit embarrassed to admit that I regularly play video games. "Madden NFL" is the only game I have consistently purchased every year for at least a decade. Because I am a Cincinnati Bengals fan, this consistently excellent game is the only way I can see my beloved team in the Superbowl. Carson Palmer and Chad Ochocinco defeated Brett Favre and the Vikings in the big game tonight (Steve Hayes should be happy). After this glorious victory I watched as my virtual team poured virtual Gatorade on Marvin Lewis and accepted a virtual Lombardi trophy from a virtual Roger Goodell. Cut to the White House. Virtual Carson Palmer is presenting a virtual jersey to a virtual Barack Obama. Thinking back over the last eight versions of this game, I couldn't recall a single version in which the last team standing presented a jersey to George W. Bush. This is obviously a harmless addition to an otherwise great game, but I still find it more than a little irritating. President Obama has already stepped between me and my doctor. Does he really need to invade my favorite video game as well?

An excellent question. The Scrapbook is reliably informed that Nancy Pelosi is opening an investigation into the sources of Mr. Barlow's funding. ♦

President Obama, as depicted in 'Madden NFL 11'

What's That You Say?

The Scrapbook was horrified last week to learn that one in five American teenagers suffers from hearing loss. By any measure, 20 percent is a lot of teenagers—approximately 6.5 million, in fact—and represents a 15-20 percent increase in the past two decades. To be sure, the "hearing loss" described in the stories is comparatively slight; but slight hearing loss in youth can only mean a more profound loss at later stages in life when hearing loss is common.

Any parent of a teenager can identify the culprits: digital technology and loud music. It stands to reason that pushing tiny speakers inside ears and then listening to roof-raising amplification will take its toll on the hearing

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mechanism. The question, however, is what to do about it.

No doubt, every adolescent in America is being admonished not to listen to so much loud noise—whether on iPods, at concerts, or through any old-fashioned delivery system. And like adolescents since time immemorial, today's teenagers are resolutely ignoring the advice just as their Baby Boom parents ignored it in 1970.

The other problem is that "hearing loss" has become one of those afflictions so pervasive that no one pays much attention to the details. Depending on which source you consult, the number is either one in six, or one in ten, Americans of all ages who suffer from hearing loss. (It's one in six for Australians and, mysteriously, one in four for New Zealanders.) According to recent studies, one in four American workers exposed to high levels of noise have suffered hearing loss. Other surveys indicate that one in four combat soldiers returned from Iraq and Afghanistan, where concussive explosions and gunfire are routine, suffer hearing loss. The manufacturers of hearing aids tell us—as a public service, of course—that only one in five Americans who would benefit from a hearing aid actually uses one. And on it goes.

As anyone who has ever conversed with an elderly relative can attest, hearing loss is a physical manifestation of old age, rather like brittleness of bone or fondness for Oldies concerts, and there does not seem to be much medical science can do to prevent it. So while The Scrapbook is, indeed, concerned about the fact that one in five American teenagers suffers premature hearing loss, especially as a consequence of listening to Green Day, there is an upside as well: While 6.5 million adolescents and their grandparents are locked in mutual incomprehension, the parental generation can say—out loud—whatever is on its mind. ♦

'Bull Cheese'

The Scrapbook takes no pleasure in seeing dirty politicians skate. But we confess to a smirk or two this past week when former Illinois governor Rod Blagojevich was found guilty of only one count—lying to the FBI—out of the 24 brought against him in front of a federal jury.

We smirked because the prosecutor in this case was Patrick Fitzgerald, the same man who brought trumped up charges against Scooter Libby, a top aide to Vice President Cheney, in the infamous investigation into who leaked the name of CIA analyst Valerie Plame to the late Robert Novak (the answer was Secretary of State Colin Powell's flunky Richard Armitage, who was treated with kid gloves by Fitzgerald).

In this case, Fitzgerald got the grand jury to indict the proverbial ham sandwich, but the jury convicted only one poppy seed from the bun.

Blago's attorney was jubilant leaving what should have been (for him) a dreadful scene: "This guy Fitzgerald is a master at indicting people for noncriminal behavior," Sam Adam told reporters. "And if you don't believe me, go ask Scooter Libby. Same thing happened with him. They couldn't get him on any substantive offense, so they got him on some bull cheese that wasn't even a crime." Well, we half agree with Adam, and it's certainly good to see the attorney for a Democratic governor stand up for Scooter Libby, but we're not sure Libby deserves to be lumped in with the likes of Blagojevich—that's "bull cheese," too.

Prosecutors have said they will retry Blagojevich on the other 23 counts. ♦

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Profiles in Timidity, Eric Holder Edition

Attorney General Eric Holder recently announced that he would again delay implementing standards to prevent sexual abuse of inmates in the nation's prisons. The proposed standards, which have been percolating since 2003, are mostly a matter of common sense: They ask prisons to adopt zero tolerance policies towards rape, segregate vulnerable inmates, and monitor everything closely.

Given the severity of the problem—conservative estimates indicate that one inmate in ten is sexually abused behind bars—the standards are desperately needed. If the government can't protect people in its immediate custody from being raped, what exactly can it do? Certainly, the standards don't lack for public support. In fact, a mind-bogglingly diverse coalition of groups ranging from Human Rights Watch and the ACLU on the left to the American Conservative Union and Family Research Council on the right has come out in support of them.

Corrections professionals, however, have Holder's ear and have delayed them because they want to conserve their budgets (yes, the standards will cost money to implement), and, in some cases, protect prison guards from liability (in juvenile facilities, guard-on-inmate attacks may be more common than inmate-on-inmate). Enough is enough. Holder should approve the standards without any more delay. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'Over the years, reporters learn that there are a relative handful of the public officials with whom we deal who can be counted on to expand our understanding of events. These are the men and women who have probed deeply into the forces shaping the country—or their part of it—and often anticipate the challenges still to come. During the eight years he was governor of Iowa, Tom Vilsack . . . " (David Broder, *Washington Post*, August 15). ♦

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The Weekly Standard (ISSN 1083-3013), a division of Clarity Media Group, is published weekly (except the first week in January, third week in April, second week in July, and fourth week in August) at 1150 17th St., NW, Suite 505, Washington D.C. 20036. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 50108, Boulder, CO 80322-0108. For subscription customer service in the United States, call 1-800-274-7293. For new subscription orders, please call 1-800-283-2014. Subscribers: Please send new subscription orders and changes of address to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 50108, Boulder, CO 80322-0108. Please include your latest magazine mailing label. Allow 3 to 5 weeks for arrival of first copy and address changes. Canadian/foreign orders require additional postage and must be paid in full prior to commencement of service. Canadian/foreign subscribers may call 1-850-682-7644 for subscription inquiries. American Express, Visa/MasterCard payments accepted. Cover price, $4.95. Back issues, $4.95 (includes postage and handling). Send letters to the editor to The Weekly Standard, 1150 17th Street, N.W., Suite 505, Washington, DC 20036-4617. For a copy of The Weekly Standard Privacy Policy, visit www.weeklystandard.com or write to Customer Service, The Weekly Standard, 1150 17th St., NW, Suite 505, Washington, D.C. 20036.

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Downhill from Here

The British author-diplomat Duff Cooper once divided the ages of man into arbitrary three-decade increments: From birth to 30 is youth, and from 30 to 60 years is middle age. Early last month I descended, irrevocably, into old age.

Now, I know that 60 is the new 50, and for good or ill, I seem to be in reasonable health. I also know that reaching the age of 60 is not necessarily a perch on the sliding board to death, and that people are living longer now than they did in Duff Cooper's (1890-1954) time. But the milestone is still a shock—and a paradox as well. Of course, I am not the first person in history to see mortality coming into sudden (and unexpected) focus, or to wonder where the years have gone. The past is another country, as L.P. Hartley said; but the past is equally omnipresent. My youth seems very far away, but the intervening years have raced by unnoticed. I suppose this is the consequence of leading a busy life.

For which I am grateful. To be sure, if life were to be lived again, I would do one or two, maybe three, things differently. But on the whole I cannot complain: I've done things I wanted to do, visited places I yearned to see, achieved a station in life that would have pleased, perhaps surprised, my younger self. To the standard accoutrements of a happy life—alluring spouse, inquiring mind, accomplished children, contented beagles, even a SmartCar—may be added the ability to play jazz piano by ear, a decent clothes sense, the experience of witnessing some historical events, a first edition of *The Great Gatsby*.

So why am I in an elegiac mood? Part of the reason is that reaching the age of 60 does concentrate the mind as the body hurtles toward oblivion. As a lifelong reader of the obituary pages I have long since noticed that I could easily blend into the mortuary crowd. More than a few of my childhood acquaintances, classmates, and contemporaries are gone. I am not unmindful of the fact that my own father died in his middle 60s and that Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley, and Kennedy all were younger than I am now when they perished.

MATT COLLINS

The other reason is that, morbidity aside, I have not properly adjusted to the reality of my age. Like many people of relatively advanced years I feel nowhere near the vicinity of the actual number: I seem to have the same nervous energy, the same habits and tastes, even the same general outlook, I had in my 30s and 40s. I have the household clumsiness of the adolescent boy, and my sense of humor seems unchanged since childhood. I still feel slightly abashed among people who are visibly older than I, and am surprised when younger people accord me deference.

I skipped a grade in elementary school and so was always the youngest person in school classes; for years I was often the youngest person where I worked. Needless to say, it has been mildly startling to realize, sitting at the conference table in our offices, that I am now one of the older people around. Whenever I begin to reminisce about the Nixon administration, or seeing Duke Ellington or Eleanor Roosevelt, a respectful hush descends.

This disconnection between perception and reality has its comical moments as well. Living as I do in the city where I grew up, I occasionally see somebody on the street who, for a moment, looks like someone I once knew. At such times I have to remind myself that the girl I took to see *Georgy Girl* in 1966, or the young man I worked with at Reuters in the 1970s, is probably gray-haired like me. When my father was my present age he seemed to me considerably more "elderly," even decrepit, than I am today—or so I think. Am I sadly deluded? Sitting beside a pretty young woman at a dinner party, I must make some effort to bear in mind that she probably thinks I'm an amusing older gentleman, or that I remind her of her father.

Anyway, here we are at the port of embarkation into a seventh decade. The biblical allotment of three score and ten gives me another decade; actuarial statistics push it along a little further. Like any good reactionary, I would rather survey the past than speculate about the future, and there is considerably more past than future to contemplate. The nice thing about entering the springtime of one's senility is that I am blissfully exempt from unrealized dreams, shamelessly pleased with present circumstances, sufficiently content to be relaxed about tomorrow, much too preoccupied to care about eternity. Which sounds, I confess, like the calm before the storm, or a prelude to catastrophe in some form or other.

Philip Terzian

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the weekly Standard

He's No Muslim, He's a Progressive

"Ike's not a Communist, he's a golfer." That was Russell Kirk's succinct response to the claim by John Birchers in the 1950s that President Eisenhower was a Communist.

In that spirit, and speaking, we think, for the vast majority of those opposed to the Ground Zero mosque, and in response to many inquiries as to where we stand on this pressing issue, THE WEEKLY STANDARD would like to say, formally and emphatically, without any mental reservations or purpose of evasion: President Obama is not a Muslim. (And, it turns out, he too is a golfer.)

Not that—we hasten to add, looking over our shoulder at Speaker Nancy Pelosi's investigators approaching our office—there would be anything wrong with his being a Muslim. And we also hasten to add that we've just realized, with a gasp of embarrassment verging on horror, that in the preceding paragraph we used the term Ground Zero mosque. The Associated Press has officially expressed its disapproval of that appellation. After all, the AP has explained, the planned mosque is not right smack-dab at the epicenter of Ground Zero.

Still, with all this confusion abounding, we do wonder if it isn't a bit judgmental of the mainstream media to condemn the 18 percent of Americans who say they think Barack Obama is a Muslim. For one thing, this is fewer than the number of Americans who say that intelligent beings from other planets have made contact with humans on Earth. And it has gotten hard even for people of good will to keep things straight.

For example, mosque defender Jeffrey Goldberg has made much of remarks by Faisal Abdul Rauf, the organizer of the Community Center Formerly Known as the Ground Zero Mosque, at a 2003 memorial service for Daniel Pearl. As evidence that Rauf is "a moderate, forward-leaning Muslim," Goldberg quotes Rauf as saying:

> We are here to assert the Islamic conviction of the moral equivalency of our Abrahamic faiths. If to be a Jew means to say with all one's heart, mind and soul "*Shma`Yisrael, Adonai Elohenu Adonai Ahad*; hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One," not only today I am a Jew, I have always been one. . . . If to be a Christian is to love the Lord our God with all of my heart, mind and soul, and to love for my fellow human being what I love for myself, then not only am I a Christian, but I have always been one. . . . And I am here to inform you, with the full authority of the Quranic texts and the practice of the Prophet Muhammad, that to say "La ilaha illallah Muhammadun rasulullah" is no different.

So Rauf is a Muslim, but he's also a Jew, and a Christian, and he's always been all of them. It's amazing that only 18 percent of Americans are all mixed up about President Obama's religion.

But Americans aren't all mixed up in their judgment of President Obama's policies. Obama said last week, at a Hollywood fundraiser, that he and congressional Democrats "have been able to deliver the most progressive legislative agenda—one that helps working families—not just in one generation, maybe two, maybe three."

Obama made this claim about the magnitude of his progressive agenda Monday night. By Thursday, his allies, looking at public opinion polls showing amazingly wide and deep hostility to his signature health care legislation, were on a conference call advising Democrats to minimize the scope of the health care bill.

As Ben Smith reported in *Politico*, under the headline "Dems retreat on health care cost pitch,"

> Key White House allies are dramatically shifting their attempts to defend health care legislation, abandoning claims that it will reduce costs and the deficit, and instead stressing a promise to "improve it" The messaging shift was circulated this afternoon on a conference call. . . . It was based on polling from three top Democratic pollsters, John Anzalone, Celinda Lake, and Stan Greenberg. The confidential presentation . . . suggests that Democrats are

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acknowledging the failure of their predictions that the health care legislation would grow more popular after its passage, as its benefits became clear and rhetoric cooled. . . . "Straightforward 'policy' defenses fail to [move] voters' opinions about the law," says one slide. . . . The presentation also concedes that the fiscal and economic arguments that were the White House's first and most aggressive sales pitch have essentially failed. "Many don't believe health care reform will help the economy," says one slide. The presentation's final page of "Don'ts" counsels against claiming "the law will reduce costs and [the] deficit."

And the kicker:

The presentation also counsels against the kind of grand claims of change that accompanied the legislation's passage. "Keep claims small and credible; don't overpromise or 'spin' what the law delivers," it says, suggesting supporters say, "The law is not perfect, but it does good things and helps many people. Now we'll work to improve it."

So progressivism seeks to bring big changes to our backward country. Progressives like to dream about passing "the most progressive legislative agenda . . . not just in one generation, maybe two, maybe three." But when progressivism has to give up its grand transformational claims, then we're back in the world of reality and results, of the practical consequences of policy choices. A political debate over consequences rather than intentions, and over the real world rather than an imagined one, is one that is, as it has been for a long time, good for conservatives and bad for progressives.

It's similar with the Community Center Formerly Known as the Ground Zero Mosque. Today's progressives are multiculturalists. They're inclined to make grand claims about the positive merits of a multicultural, nonjudgmental mosaic replacing our old, uniculturalist melting-pot view of America. But when political realities force them to retreat, as Obama has done in the mosque controversy, from a proud multiculturalism to a narrow defense of the right to the free exercise of religion and the right to build on private property, they're in trouble. The free exercise of religion and respect for private property are not a promising agenda for progressives.

Progressivism is in retreat. Obama's problem isn't that people falsely think he's a Muslim. It's that the public is correctly concluding he's a garden-variety multiculturalist progressive. So November's election won't just be a repudiation of one non-Muslim president. It will be a repudiation of a multiculturalist progressive worldview—and of the bitter elites who cling desperately to that worldview and are consumed by antipathy to most Americans, who don't.

—William Kristol

Making It in America

By Thomas J. Donohue
President and CEO
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Addressing the AFL-CIO recently, President Obama said: "For generations, manufacturing was the ticket to a better life for the American worker. But as the world became smaller, outsourcing, an easier way to increase profits, a lot of those jobs shifted to low-wage nations. . . . We are going to rebuild this economy stronger than before, and at the heart of it are going to be three powerful words: Made in America."

The president's belief that American manufacturers can help reignite our economy is exactly right. But he misdiagnoses the challenges facing manufacturers, and his policies are doing little to advance their cause.

There's no question that American manufacturers are hurting from the recent recession, but this doesn't change the fact that in the past two decades they have set new records for output, revenues, profits, profit rates, and return on investment. In 2008, the United States remained by far the world's largest manufacturer.

The same can't be said of factory jobs. U.S. manufacturing employment peaked in 1979 at 19 million jobs. But the jobs haven't "shifted to low-wage nations," as the president asserts. Rather, the lost jobs have gone, for the most part, to a country called "productivity." Technological change, automation, and widespread use of information technologies have allowed firms to boost output even as some have cut payrolls.

The productivity revolution is a worldwide phenomenon. In fact, China shed 25 million manufacturing jobs from 1994 to 2004, 10 times more than the United States lost in the same period, according to William Overholt of the RAND Corporation.

So if offshoring isn't the cause of manufacturing job loss, what can we do to spur our manufacturing sector? The simple answer is to boost exports. President Obama acknowledges that one in three U.S. manufacturing jobs depends on exports, and yet he has failed to advance a trade agenda that would result in more U.S. manufacturing jobs and sales. Put simply, we can't "make it in America" if we can't sell at least some of it abroad.

If you don't believe me, listen to the former head of the AFL-CIO from 1952 to 1979, George Meaney, who wrote: "Millions of American workers are dependent for their livelihood on the sale overseas of the goods they produce. . . . We must keep in our minds the necessity to find even more markets for American-made goods overseas."

We need to get back to the pro-manufacturing, pro-trade policies of the past, which many presidents have turned into political success. For the sake of those who make things in America, we hope that President Obama does the same.

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Comment at www.chamberpost.com.

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Duking It Out

The Dukakis administration that never was.

BY NOEMIE EMERY

As Barack Obama sees his ratings descend toward the high 30s, he is increasingly described as the second coming of James Earl Carter Jr., whose presidency, gone but hardly forgotten, lives on in masochists' minds. The comparison is unkind and not quite on target: This is less Carter II than the lost presidency of Michael Dukakis, which seemed a sure thing at this date 22 years ago, and from which we were saved by the elder George Bush.

Of course, no one thought Dukakis could be the messiah, but in other ways the connections are strong: both creatures of the liberal Northeast and of Harvard, with no sense at all of most of the rest of the country; both rationalists who impose legalistic criteria on emotion-rich subjects; both with fixed ideas of who society's victims are, which do not accord with the views of the public; and both with a tin ear for the culture and a genius for creating wedge issues that split their own party. Obama has the Carter naïveté in foreign affairs—treating allies like foes, and vice versa—but it is the Dukakis campaign that provides the better parallel.

Obama's culture war began in spring 2008, when he talked at a fundraiser about people who "get bitter [and] cling to guns or religion." It jumped up a notch the next summer when he volunteered that the Cambridge police "acted stupidly" in the arrest of his friend Skip Gates, and erupted exponentially when he expressed support for a mosque to be built within blocks of Ground Zero, against the wishes of the survivors of the people who died there, two-thirds of New Yorkers, and everyone else not a liberal blogger or columnist.

The culture war of Michael Dukakis began with a 1972 prison reform law (signed by the governor before him) that gave unsupervised furloughs to prisoners serving life without parole; it grew worse when his state legislature passed a bill requiring teachers to lead their students each day in the Pledge of Allegiance. Dukakis consulted his state supreme court, which told him the bill would be unconstitutional, based on a 1943 ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court, which held that "requiring a student to recite the pledge under threat of expulsion violated . . . freedom of speech." There was no threat of expulsion or anything else, but Dukakis vetoed it anyway. In 1976 (during his first stint as governor), he also vetoed a bill to amend the prison reform bill to excise the furlough provision, two years after Willie Horton, who had stabbed a 17-year-old boy so badly that he died with one pint of blood

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WEEKLY STANDARD PHOTO ILLUSTRATION / AP PHOTO / MICHAEL E. SAMOJEDEN

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left in his body, had been convicted of murder and sentenced to life.

In 1986, while on furlough, Horton escaped and was caught more than ninth months later in Maryland, after a crime spree in which he stole a car and terrorized a young couple, stabbing the man repeatedly and raping his fiancée. In 1987, when Dukakis was in the early stages of his campaign for president, the Massachusetts legislature again passed a bill rescinding the furloughs, this time by veto-proof numbers. Dukakis signed the bill under protest, making it clear that he still backed the program.

Al Gore raised the issue in the Democratic primaries, but Dukakis sloughed it off with one sentence, and the issue was dropped. The Bush campaign did not make this mistake. They forged Dukakis's two vetoes on the pledge/furlough issues into an assault on Dukakis's discretion and judgment that turned a 17-point lead in mid-summer into a 8-point loss to Bush in the fall.

Liberals never understood what occurred. They never figured out that the furlough was a stand-in for the "use of force," for the ability to recognize evil and use force to contain it as Bush did when Iraq invaded Kuwait. "He didn't realize that these issues could really put him outside the mainstream," a Bush aide told Paul Taylor, the *Washington Post* reporter who wrote a book about the campaign.

> He comes from a certain parochial culture—Massachusetts, Harvard, liberal—where asking someone to salute the flag raises the case law on loyalty oaths. For most people, the Pledge issue went to the symbol of the nation: It essentially raised the question of whether we were a special nation, with a special role and special responsibilities in the world.

Dukakis, who took a dim view of American power, would have likely said "no" to that question, as Obama explicitly did with his lawyerly reply to a British reporter: "I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism."

Obama comes from the same cultural niche as Dukakis and operates from the same point of view: that the death penalty is wrong and the benefit of the doubt goes to the accused in most situations; that in a confrontation with a black man, a white cop will act "stupidly"; that patriotic displays are déclassé; that Muslims are an imperiled minority and must be indulged at all costs. To the Bush campaign in 1988, the furlough was about terrible crimes, and Dukakis's judgment about a convicted murderer serving a life term who was let out on unsupervised furloughs. To liberals, of course, it was about race, as Horton was black and his victims white. Taylor wrote that the Bush campaign came "out of George Wallace's and Richard Nixon's playbooks. . . . They 'waved the bloody shirt' just as nineteenth-century politicians had waved it for a generation after the Civil War."

Hendrik Hertzberg (who promoted the mosque in 2010 in the *New Yorker*) wrote in 1988 in the *New Republic* that

> Bush ran the most vicious campaign of the second half of the 20th century. It was a campaign that quite openly exploited primitive racial-sexual fears. More subtly . . . the Bush campaign exploited nativist prejudice. . . . Dukakis is not an American, Dukakis is different, this was the unwholesome subtheme that tied together the pledgehammer assault. . . . It is hard to resist the supposition that some among the Bush people calculated that these particular attacks would be particularly effective against a big-nosed beetle-browed Mediterranean type with a Jewish wife.

It's hard to resist only if you think Dukakis's judgment was flawless, and that sympathy for the feelings of survivors of those killed on September 11 is in reality nothing but hate. The GOP is "seething with hatred toward vulnerable religious and ethnic groups," says Peter Beinart, though the party is running a large number of Hispanics, blacks, and children of Indian immigrants for high state and federal office. To Marc Ambinder of the *Atlantic*, Obama's coalition of "young Americans, modernists, seculars, [and] suburban couples who believe in the virtues of tolerance" is battling "a resurgence of anti-cosmopolitanism [and] the constructed identity of America as a collection of white ethnic immigrants"—on the part of 68 percent of the American people, 54 percent of all Democrats, and such notable racists as Harry Reid, majority leader of the United States Senate, and ex-Democratic party chair Howard Dean.

Like the furlough, the mosque issue is a bad one for Democrats, and one their defenders get wrong. "The first America tends to make the finer sounding speeches, and the second America often strikes cruder, more xenophobic notes," says the *New York Times*'s Ross Douthat. This is a nice point, and leads one to further comparisons: The first America is full of itself and the second one isn't; the first America is filled with Ambinder's "modernists, seculars, [and] suburban couples who believe in the virtues of tolerance," while the second is filled with "f—ing NASCAR retards" (as Eric Alterman of the *Nation* puts it). The first thinks *Newsweek* helps keep the culture from darkness and the second knows why it had to be sold for one dollar; the first thinks imams need their sensibilities coddled and those of Catholics, Jews, veterans, and evangelicals can be trashed with impunity; while the second believes this is mad. The second America thinks assault, rape, and murder are serious crimes that merit harsh punishment; the first America thinks these things disturb white Americans only if and when the assailants in question are black. The second America was ready in the summer of 1988 to elect Michael Dukakis (Greek name, Jewish wife, and the rest of it), and backed off when it came to know more about him. It did, however, elect Barack Obama (middle name of "Hussein" and the rest of it), and is right now repenting as it wakes up to reality: He is not FDR, JFK, or the liberal Reagan, but Michael Dukakis. Which is not what was wanted at all. ♦

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The Happy Curmudgeon

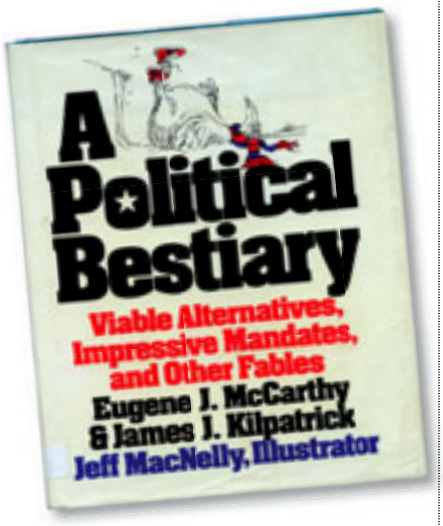
James J. Kilpatrick, 1920-2010.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

In *Wild Turkey veritas*, the ancients told us, and the phrase has no richer testament than a forgotten book called *A Political Bestiary*, by the former presidential candidate Eugene McCarthy and his friend James J. Kilpatrick, the columnist and TV commentator who died last week at 89. Kilpatrick's obituaries scarcely mentioned the book. For sound reasons, they lingered instead on his early career in the 1950s, when as editorial page editor of the *Richmond* (Virginia) *News-Leader* he launched a relentless, learned, eloquent, and obnoxious defense of Jim Crow against the Yankee antinomians who were then swarming southward, waving Supreme Court decisions and federal civil rights laws.

Like Sam Ervin and Robert Byrd, Kilpatrick emerged from his segregationist past to become a cuddly mascot of establishment Washington, I'm not sure how. The evolution of Ervin and Byrd is easy to explain. Both were loyal functionaries of the Democratic party: Ervin's hatred of Richard Nixon compensated for his hatred of black Americans, and the former Klansman Byrd exchanged his bedsheet for a role that fit him just as snugly, as a dependable anti-Republican crank. As an unrepentant right-winger, by contrast, Kilpatrick should have been beyond redemption. Yet there he was, from the 1960s on, appearing three times a week in the *Washington Post* and, for most of the 1970s, every Sunday night as a commentator on *60 Minutes*. From "massive resistance" and "interposition" to CBS and the bosom of the Graham family in little more than a decade—a neat trick.

But how? Part of the answer may be that Kilpatrick, having made the move from Richmond to Washington, wore his opinions lightly. Watching him sputter at some new instance of liberal idiocy and shake his angry jowls, you got the idea it was mostly



for show. The diffidence was thinly concealed, a symptom of PTSD. He had spent a dozen years or more furiously promoting dearly held convictions that every reasonable or sensitive person came to regard as despicable. After bus boycotts and lunch-counter sit-ins, the back-and-forth of Washington argument must have seemed a flimsy thing—the way a bumper pool table might look to Minnesota Fats. It wasn't worth sinking your heart into. He'd tried that already.

So he became a curmudgeon. *Curmudgeon* is one of those labels that signifies its opposite. "Humorists" are seldom funny, "peace advocates" are bellicose, "humanitarians" hate people, and "curmudgeons" are never curmudgeonly, not really. No man infused with the misanthropic qualities of a genuine curmudgeon is tolerated long enough to earn the affectionate pat on the head the title implies. Tamed and declawed, Kilpatrick the old seg was nobody that anybody had to worry about. He was a pussycat.

He was also one of the best writers ever to appear regularly in American newspapers, a master of the music of words, and it would be nice, if dubious, to think that official Washington let him hang around because it was wowed by his gifts as a prose artist. He was a better writer the further away he moved from policy and the machinery of government, the disputes of everyday politics. Lucky for him and his admirers, in the late sixties he bought a house on the eastern slope of the Blue Ridge and began writing about what he saw and felt, as real writers will until someone makes them stop.

This was a move fraught with peril—soupy accounts of the city-boy-moved-to-the-country have drowned hundreds of writers and thousands of readers. "I trust you will spare the reading public your little adventures in contentment," a friend warned E.B. White when he left Manhattan for Maine. White didn't, of course, being moved instead to produce *One Man's Meat*, which survives as a small classic. Kilpatrick didn't spare us either, and while the book he produced, *The Foxes' Union*, is less famous than White's, it is just as good, just as manly, funny, and humane, just as defiant of the precious and the twee. The Blue Ridge was the making of him as a writer. "Nothing much happens up here in the Blue Ridge mountains—only life, birth, death, law, philosophy, the harvest of a summer, the etched impression of a snowy night."

It was on just such a night that Gene McCarthy appeared at Kilpatrick's cabin door with a bottle of bourbon, thereby setting in motion the cogitations that led to *A Political Bestiary*. By the time Kilpatrick and McCarthy had both pegged out, they must have produced 30 books between them, but this, their only collaboration, is the one that

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best serves as a model for how to think and write about politics.

The *Bestiary* is the product of a writer's perfectly pitched ear—the application, I mean, of a writerly way of thinking about language to the language of American politics. It doesn't run to more than 20,000 words. One page each is devoted to a cliché beloved of the political class—The Impressive Mandate, The Budgetary Shortfall, The Tight Budget, The Leaping Quantum, the Broad-based Constituency, 40 in all. And each is illustrated, on the facing page, as a strange impossible beast, in an invariably flawless sketch by the great cartoonist Jeff MacNelly. The *Bestiary* appeared in 1978, yet it's amazing how many of these clichés are still fresh—I guess I should say *current*. We haven't shaken them, in any case.

Consider "parameter," a high-toned nonsense word that has proved irresistible to policy intellectuals since the Kennedy administration; deprived of its use, the entire Brookings Institution would collapse in rubble onto Massachusetts Avenue. The *Bestiary* introduces us to The Parameter, which MacNelly renders as a miserable squid-like creature, tentacles dangling limp in the water.

"To persons of limited horizons—those lacking the world view of, say, the editors of *Foreign Affairs*—a Parameter may look like a perimeter. It is not. . . . In the world of politics, Parameters live to be defined. Their arms embrace the illimitable and the unknowable, but usually they embrace the expendable. 'Within the Parameters of our budget,' people say. Then the Parameter, like the squid, emits an inky cloud and disappears."

Amused and high-spirited, tracing the line between skeptic and cynic, the whole *Bestiary* is borne aloft on the fumes from that bottle of bourbon. There's an air of resignation in it too: an acid critique of cant offered in the knowledge that the cant will outlive the critique. But the resignation isn't meant to be discouraging. The *Bestiary* is an enduring inspiration. McCarthy, a genuine misanthrope, somehow persuaded the pussycat to put the claws back in, just this once. ♦

Fleurs du Mal

North Korea's ghastly art, on display in Vienna.

BY JAMES KIRCHICK

Vienna

If the painting *Kim Jong Il, the supreme commander of the Korean People's Army, deeply concerned over the soldiers' diet* were all one had to go on, one would assume that Kim Jong Il is indeed deeply concerned about the soldiers' diets. Inspecting a humongous piece of fish, the leader of North Korea smiles as two cheerful chefs and a military aide look on with admiration. In reality, of course, Kim Jong Il does not seem to be all that concerned about the nourishment of his military—with 1.2 million men under arms, the fourth largest standing army in the world. Numerous visitors to the De-Militarized Zone along the Korean peninsula's 38th parallel have noticed that the North's soldiers are shorter, skinnier, and weaker of frame than their southern counterparts.

The idea of art serving an end beyond the stimulation of the visual senses informs the exhibit "Flowers for Kim Il Sung: Art and Architecture from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," currently on display at the Austrian Museum of Applied Arts/Contemporary Art (MAK) in Vienna. The giant, fluorescent-colored fish picture is but one of 100 paintings and posters in the first exhibition of art from the hermit kingdom to be opened to the outside world. It's all possible thanks to the cooperation of the National Gallery in Pyongyang and the Paektusan Academy of Architecture. Both institutions, like everything in North Korea, are state-run.

Viennese museum officials have been at pains to deny that there is any political motive behind the exhibit. Their mission is merely to provide a window into a society about which Westerners know very little. "'Flowers for Kim Il Sung' should in no way be viewed as a political statement, but rather purely as a unique opportunity to examine the idealizing art of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which is hardly known at all," says Peter Noever, director of the MAK, who was inspired to mount the show on a visit to Pyongyang seven years ago. "With this showing at the MAK, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has broken through its isolation—at least in terms of artistic production."

But a visit to the exhibit and a survey of the accompanying press materials and programs designed around it paints a different picture. "Flowers for Kim Il Sung" contains no works from before the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 1948. It is not, as its promoters contend, a sampling of North Korean art, but a display of propaganda in service to the late Kim Il Sung and his son. By presenting it uncritically, the Vienna museum is subtly legitimizing the world's cruelest regime.

Take the short essay by Rüdiger Frank, professor of East Asian economy and society at the University of Vienna, published in a pamphlet for an upcoming symposium entitled "Exploring North Korean Arts." Frank decries the "picture produced by our media" of North Korea, which he claims "is limited to news about famine, human rights violations and a highly militarized state that defies attempts by the USA and its allies to prevent it from possessing nuclear weapons." Apparently, nearly two decades' worth of condemnations of the North's blatantly illegal nuclear weapons program by the United Nations and Interna-

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tional Atomic Energy Agency—both of which have headquarters just a few miles from the MAK—are nothing more than the result of American machinations. Juche—the Marxist-cum-personality cult ideology founded by Kim Il Sung, which stands alongside Muammar Qaddafi's *Green Book* and Mao Zedong's *Little Red Book* as a classic in the dictator-worship genre—"puts the human being at the center and argues that with the right determination, anything can be achieved."

Moral relativism permeates Frank's analysis, which whitewashes the regime's internal repression and foreign aggression. "We know that reality is never the purest white or the darkest black," he writes, something that the starving masses of the North Korean countryside might dispute were they given the opportunity. Of the aftermath of the Korean War—a conflict precipitated by a Soviet-backed invasion across the 38th parallel by the Communist forces of Kim Il Sung, resulting in over 2 million civilian deaths and the world's most heavily militarized border—Frank writes blandly, as if there had been no responsible agent, "During the Cold War that ensued, [the Soviet Union and the United States] supported political forces that shared their respective ideals and interests."

As to the causes of the present political stalemate, he is hesitant to say anything remotely critical of the leaders who have ruled the country in Stalinist fashion for six decades. "Despite hard work by its people, recovery has been slow. Natural disasters, political and management decisions, and a hostile external environment have all served to aggravate the situation."

If "Flowers for Kim Il Sung" depicted North Korea as it actually is—with its forced labor camps, crushing political conformity, politicized starvation campaigns, international brigandage and hostage-taking, illicit nuclear proliferation to fellow rogue states, and so on—it would not be so objectionable. The MAK is counting on visitors to possess independent knowledge of this reality and to realize that the exhibit wouldn't exist at all unless the sponsors had been willing to adopt a "see no evil" attitude toward the mercurial North Korean government. "I think we're all aware of the situation in this country as far as we know," Bettina Busse, the curator of the exhibit, told me.

The press materials tiptoe around these questions: "In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea art assumes a social function and is subordinate to the revolutionary process," a press release states. As to why there is no biographical information about the artists, the museum explains: "In general, there are so many different painters that no single one of them really stands out." That says as much about the largely undifferentiated quality of the artwork on display as it does the crushing anti-individualism of the North Korean regime.

Like most socialist realism, this "art" is devoid of complexity. Whatever talents the North Korean painters may possess are tragically subordinated to Stalinist politics and stultifying adulation of the Dear Leader. The descriptions of the artwork underline its utterly bland, primitive, and unenlightening character: "The leaders' closeness to the people is repeatedly emphasized," reads the press release. "Red, internationally recognized as being symbolic of socialism, is employed most frequently." My tour guide's attempt to distinguish the works from those produced in other Communist societies by labeling it "Idealistic Realism" only underscored the lengths to which the MAK has had to go in order to justify the exhibition.

The promoters of "Flowers for Kim Il Sung" are braced for criticism, insinuating that it is Western audiences, and not the North Korean regime, that need more cross-cultural understanding and artistic enlightenment. "Our society need not fear [the art of North Korea]," says Noever in an informational video. In endorsing the exhibit and calling for further such cultural exchanges, Frank scolds those

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in the West who would portray such initiatives as supportive of the regime, explicitly likening the critics to the mass murderers in Pyongyang. "Such a painful process is necessary if we want to escape the trap of propaganda, no matter where it may originate."

Could one imagine, in the 1930s, an English gallery featuring Nazi art in such undiscerning fashion? To mount this exhibition, there was an implicit understanding between the curators and Pyongyang that thorny issues like human rights and constant threats to turn Seoul into a "sea of fire" would not be addressed. "It was clear that you can't do a show and open up a political discussion," Busse told me. "Of course you can't involve human rights. For such a show, they would not accept it." The MAK was therefore confronted with a choice: Either swallow these conditions and show the art, or proudly refuse and come home to Vienna empty-handed.

But is sacrificing the ability to present information truthfully in order to display propaganda—posing as art—worth the moral price? It would be one thing if the pieces in "Flowers for Kim Il Sung" had been smuggled out of North Korea by defectors, in which case they could be presented to audiences honestly—as artifacts of a totalitarian system—all the better to expose the horrors that are attendant upon a lack of political freedom, a controlled economy, and a closed society. But the situation at the MAK is the opposite: The museum worked in close collaboration with North Korean authorities, and the exhibit's opening event featured a speech by the head of the regime's National Gallery. Moreover, the MAK has gone out of its way to condemn what it characterizes as the philistine, imperialist fear-mongering of Western media and governments, spouting a softer version of Pyongyang's own paranoid and xenophobic worldview.

"All art is propaganda," George Orwell once wrote. "On the other hand, not all propaganda is art." It is unfortunate that the Austrian Museum of Applied Arts/Contemporary Art has apparently lost sight of the distinction. ♦

A protester at the August 3 meeting of New York's Landmarks Preservation Committee

NEWSCOM

Obama's Four Disasters

Heckuva job, Mr. President.

BY FRED BARNES

Recovery summer, opposition to Arizona's immigration law, negative campaigning, and intervention in the Ground Zero mosque dispute—call them Obama's Four Disasters. As policy, they're questionable. As political exercises, they're losers. As clues about Obama, they're evidence he's lost his political knack.

What was Obama thinking? These weren't initiatives taken suddenly. They were carefully thought out and plotted, no doubt in expectation the president would gain politically and so would Democratic candidates. Whatever calculations the White House made, they were faulty.

RECOVERY SUMMER. This was proclaimed in June, with fanfare, in a briefing by Vice President Biden and the issuance of a report titled "Summer of Recovery: Project Activity Increases in Summer 2010." The report said "millions of Americans [are] on the job today thanks to the Recovery Act"—better known as the "stimulus package"—but its work is not done. "Summer 2010 is actually poised to be the most active Recovery Act season yet."

Not quite. Obama, Biden, and company should have known better. It's true there were indicators the economy would grow and hiring by private firms would increase. But anyone who traveled outside Washington would quickly discover that slow growth and minimal hiring were at least as likely to occur. And they have. The economy has hit the brakes, the stock market is stagnant, the jobs picture has worsened, unemployment claims are up, and the notion of a summer of recovery has become an embarrassment.

If there were even a glimmer of doubt about a summertime boom, you

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wouldn't want to put a chronic exaggerator like Biden out front. He tends to gush uncontrollably. The stimulus will cause "even more ripple effects" than ever this summer, he declared. And more jobs

> means a lot more lunch breaks at the local diner because there weren't any lunch breaks, there weren't the jobs that existed; and a lot more trips to the barbershop, to the movies, to the department store, helping those businesses they go to maintain their employment base and increase the employment base.

Sounds nice. Too bad it hasn't happened.

OPPOSITION TO THE ARIZONA IMMIGRATION LAW. This is what's known as a 70-30 issue. Obama has taken the 30 percent position, which puts him athwart the vast majority of Americans. The White House said the decision to file suit against the Arizona law was made by Attorney General Eric Holder. But Holder works for Obama, who could have told him to back off.

There are several reasons this would have made sense. The law was not likely to have prompted a wave of profiling of Hispanics. It was (and is) popular in Arizona, and the more folks around the country heard about it, the more they liked it (and still do).

It also would've bolstered Obama's drive for immigration reform. The president favors the comprehensive approach, which includes amnesty for the 12 million illegal immigrants in the country. Given the politics of the issue, the only way to get what Obama wants is by first stepping up enforcement of immigration laws. Instead he opted for nullifying a popular enforcement statute.

NEGATIVE CAMPAIGNING. Obama's great gift as a politician is the ability to rise above the normal pushing, shoving, and name-calling of politics and appear statesmanlike. He's derided these days by Republicans for his rhetoric in 2008 about hope and change, ending polarization, and changing the way Washington does business. But it's what elected him.

Now he's abandoned it. In his current stump speech, he does two things. He talks about "a lot of things I'm very proud of that we've done over the last two years," including health care reform. And he attacks Republicans for "constant, nonstop opposition on everything." Guess which one the media devours. His criticism of Republicans is not limited to political appearances. He's begun attacking them in his Saturday radio address from the White House. This is both unappealing and unpresidential.

Obama has fallen in love with an analogy about Republicans driving a car—a metaphor for the economy—into a ditch and asking for the keys back now that Obama has pulled it out. It's not particularly clever, but he dwells on it. "It has since become the Mr. Potato Head of campaign stump speech metaphors," wrote Carol E. Lee of *Politico*. "The president keeps expanding on it." That's not a compliment.

THE GROUND ZERO MOSQUE. This is another 70-30 issue, and Obama is again in the minority. We know his decision to defend the plan of Muslims to build a mosque near Ground Zero wasn't a spur of the moment thing. He put out a prepared text of his speech on this subject before it was delivered to a group of Muslims at a Ramadan event at the White House. He backtracked the next day.

Until then, he'd wisely stayed out of the controversy, his press secretary dismissing it as a "local issue." There was nothing to be gained and a lot to lose by jumping in. Yet he couldn't resist holding forth, just as he couldn't when his pal Skip Gates was arrested. Obama is not one to hold his tongue, no matter what the subject. He once again took the position of the elites against that of most Americans.

The contrast between the political adroitness of Obama as a presidential candidate and Obama as president is striking. His campaign was nearly error-free. As president, he's made a string of unforced errors. He's lost his touch, and chances are it won't come back. ♦

Time to Hang Up the Tennis Shoes

Dino Rossi takes on Patty Murray.

BY WHITNEY BLAKE

Pacific County, Washington

The Senate race in Washington state is emerging as one of the most-watched electoral battles this year. It pits three-term Democratic incumbent Patty Murray against businessman and former GOP state senator Dino Rossi. In what was once a safe Democratic seat, Rossi is running nearly even.

Still, toppling Murray is a tall order in a state that Barack Obama carried 58 to 40 percent. "In every race [Murray's] been in, they've said this is going to be her toughest race ever," said Anne Martens, communications director for Washington State Democrats. Stuart Elway, who polls in the Northwest, has found her approval rating above 50 percent only once in 18 years, yet he notes "she's mowed down three Republican congressmen in successive elections" by a minimum of 8 points.

Indeed, many have underestimated Murray. Known as a "mom in ten-

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nis shoes," she got her start in politics trying to save her kids' state-funded preschool from budget cuts. She ran for the school board, then board president, then state senator before winning a U.S. Senate seat in 1992. Now she ranks fourth in the Democratic leadership, as conference secretary, and is a senior member of both the Appropriations and Budget committees.

It's a powerful position for bringing home the bacon, as the senator likes to remind Washington voters. "Patty Murray is going to stand with [her constituents], and she's very proud of that," said Julie Edwards, communications director for the senator's campaign. She funneled almost $700 million in stimulus funds to transportation projects in Washington. In fiscal year 2010, she sponsored or cosponsored 190 earmarks worth just under $220 million, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

Murray also sits on the Veterans' Affairs committee and has sponsored numerous bills that benefit the military in her state. Her first ad consisted solely of endorsements by veterans.

Murray generally toes the party line. She voted for the stimulus, financial reform, and health care bills. But she supports an estate tax compromise to exempt family businesses and farms below $5 million per individual and $10 million per couple, and she's undecided on cap and trade. Unlike some Democrats in tight races, she campaigned and fundraised with Barack Obama on primary day last Tuesday.

Murray is not taking anything for granted. Her campaign spent $3.9 million in July, most of it on ad time. Her strategy is to link her opponent with Bush and to paint him as an extremist. One Democratic consultant familiar with the race expects her to win, but cautioned, "If the [Republican] tidal wave gets big enough, she's on the edge."

That's what Dino Rossi is hoping for, but he also has assets of his own. While he lost two bids for governor, they brought him name recognition—especially the 2004 race, the closest gubernatorial election in U.S. history. Rossi won the initial vote count, then a recount, before losing a second recount by 129 votes to Democrat Christine Gregoire. Four years later, Gregoire beat him for reelection by 53 to 47 percent.

In both those elections, Rossi may have been weighed down by a national ticket unpopular in the state. Local Republicans had to "swim against the tide to get elected" during the Bush era, said Chris Vance, a former chair of the state Republican party. Rossi finished 3 points ahead of Bush in 2004 and 7 points ahead of McCain in 2008.

Dino Rossi, Republican hopeful

Rossi is a "very reasonable Republican voice," said Jonathan Collegio, communications director of American Crossroads, a 527 group backed by Karl Rove and Ed Gillespie. In a state where church attendance is low, Rossi is stressing pocketbook issues—cutting spending, keeping the Bush tax cuts, repealing the death tax and the financial reform bill, repealing and replacing Obamacare, and blocking cap and trade.

Rossi made his fortune in commercial real estate, then ran for state senate unsuccessfully in 1992 and came back to win in 1996. In 2003, he served as chairman of the Ways & Means Committee in the state senate. In his first campaign ad, he touts his business background and his role as a legislative leader in balancing the state budget without raising taxes to overcome a $3 billion deficit. He contrasts this record with Murray's. "If all you're known for is bringing home pork," he told reporters, "this probably isn't the year to be saying that."

To kick off his campaign, Rossi crisscrossed Pacific County in southwest Washington, stopping at a cranberry farm, a wind farm, an oyster farm, a community bank, and a forum with small business owners. Many of them voiced concerns over the estate tax breaking up family businesses; environmental regulations and red tape halting their operations; their difficulty getting loans; and health care costs rising. Rossi has stuck to his economic platform ever since.

With the primary now behind him, Rossi will seek to win over primary voters who chose one of his competitors, notably the 12 percent who supported the Tea Party-backed candidate, former Washington Redskins tight end Clint Didier. In the state's open "jungle" primary, 15 candidates competed for the top two slots. Murray got the largest share of the votes, leading Rossi by 13 points. But there was also good news for Republicans: GOP candidates together had 49.7 percent of the vote, Democrats only 48.8 percent, as this magazine went to press.

Victory could hinge on mobilization, and the National Republican Senatorial Committee is hoping the voter enthusiasm disparity this year will put Rossi over the top: A mid-August Survey USA poll found almost twice as many Republicans as Democrats—and four times as many conservatives as liberals—are more enthusiastic about this election than previous ones.

Going into the fall, Murray has the fatter campaign treasury ($3.2 million to Rossi's $1.8 million) and a lingering edge in most polls. "Rossi still has the steeper hill to climb," said pollster Elway.

But it's a hill, not a mountain. ♦

AP PHOTO / GREG WAHL-STEPHENS

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The 72-Hour Expert

Everything you always wanted to know about Afghanistan . . .

By P.J. O'Rourke

Kabul

If you spend 72 hours in a place you've never been, talking to people whose language you don't speak about social, political, and economic complexities you don't understand, and you come back as the world's biggest know-it-all, you're a reporter. Either that or you're President Obama. I called my wife. She said, no, she certainly is not vacationing at government expense in some jet-set hot spot with scads of her BFFs. Looks like I'm not President Obama. But I am a reporter, fresh from Kabul. What do you want to know about Afghanistan, past, present, or future? Ask me anything.

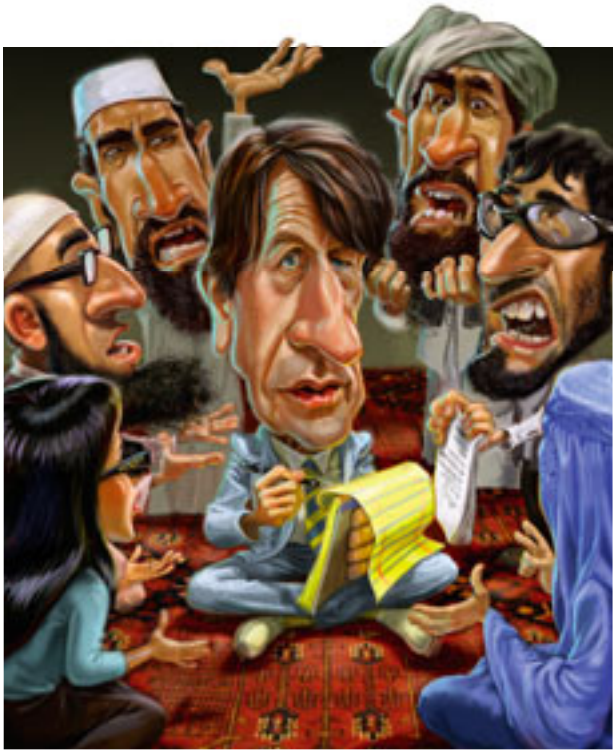
As all good reporters do, I prepared for my assignment with extensive research. I went to an Afghan restaurant in Prague. Getting a foretaste—as it were—of my subject, I asked the restaurant's owner (an actual Afghan), "So what's up with Afghanistan?"

He said, "Americans must understand that Afghanistan is a country of honor. The honor of an Afghan is in his gun, his land, and his women. You take a man's honor if you take his gun, his land or his women."

And the same goes for where I live in New Hampshire. I inquired whether exceptions could be made, on the third point of honor, for ex-wives.

"Oh yes," he said.

Afghanistan—so foreign and yet so familiar and, like home, with such wonderful lamb chops. I asked the restaurateur about other similarities between New Hampshire and Afghanistan. "I don't know," he said. "Most of my family lives in L.A."



GARY LOCKE

In Kabul I was met at the airport by M. Amin Mudaqiq, bureau chief for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Afghan branch, Radio Azadi. "Our office is just down the main road," he said, "but since it's early in the morning we'll take the back way, because of the Suicides." That last word, I noticed, was pronounced as a proper noun, the way we would say "Beatles" slightly differently than "beetles." And, in a sense, suicide bombers do aspire to be the rock stars of the Afghan insurgency (average career span being about the same in both professions).

"The Suicides usually attack early in the morning," Amin said. "It's a hot country and the explosive vests are thick and heavy."

I'd never thought about suicide bombing in terms of comfort. Here's some guy who's decided to blow himself gloriously to bits and he's pounding the pavement all dressed up in the blazing sun, sweat running down his face, thinking, "Gosh this thing itches, I'm pooped, let's call it off."

"It's the same with car bombs," Amin said. "You don't want to be driving around the whole day with police everywhere and maybe get a ticket."

Imagine the indignity of winding up in traffic court instead of the terrorist equivalent of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Kabul is a walled city, which sounds romantic except the walls are pre-cast reinforced concrete blast barriers, 10 feet tall and 15 feet long and moved into place with cranes. The walls are topped with sandbags and the sandbags are topped with guard posts from which gun barrels protrude.

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Amin pointed out the sights. "There's U.N. headquarters." All I could see was blast barriers, sandbags and gun barrels. "There's the German embassy"—barriers, bags, and barrels. "There's the embassy of China"—barriers, bags, and barrels. I spotted a rough-hewn stone fort on a hilltop, looking more the way ancient Kabul should look. "Oh, 19th-century British," Amin said.

Security was all over the place, in various senses of the phrase. I have never seen so many types and kinds of soldiers, policemen, and private security guards or such a welter of uniforms, each in a different pattern of camouflage every one of which stuck out like a toreador's suit of lights against the white blast walls. Some of this security was on alert, some was asleep, some was spit-and-polish, some had its shoes untied and some, rather unaccountably, was walking around without weapons.

None of the security was American. Americans don't patrol Kabul. The American military is suffering its usual fate, the same as it does at an Army base in Georgia—shunted off to places the locals don't care to go.

Afghanistan's capital is located in a grand hollow, as if someone had closed the Rockies in tight around Denver. On the slopes of Kabul's mountains there is another cityscape of small stone houses. They could be from the time of the prophet although they all seem to have aluminum window frames. This is where the poor live, with panes of glass to keep out the winter winds but not much else. At night you can see how far the electric wires run uphill—not very far. The water pipes don't go up at all, and residents—women and children residents I'm sure—must climb from the bottom with their water.

Then, around the corner from the blast walls, there's a third Kabul, an ordinary city with stores and restaurants open to the street and parking impossible to find. The architecture is overseas modern in cement and chrome with some leftover Soviet modern in just cement. It's a bit worn and torn looking but less so than Detroit or Anacostia.

Security here is merely ubiquitous as opposed to omnipresent. Men, women, and children mingle. Women cover themselves in public but not more than my grandmother did at Mass. An occasional down-to-the-ground burka is seen but not as often as in London. In the malls, clothing shops predominate. Men's and women's clothes are shinier and more vividly colored than those seen in a traditional society such as New Hampshire.

'The Turkmen settle close to the desert. The Pashtuns settle close to the source of the water.' Downstream and upstream. It's the plot of 'Chinatown.' If you don't understand Afghanistan, blame Robert Towne.

Traditionalism being one of the things that makes Afghanistan so hard for Americans to understand. We Americans have so many traditions. For instance our political traditions date back to the 12th-century English Parliament if not to the Roman Senate. Afghans, on the other hand, have had the representative democracy kind of politics for only six years. Afghanistan's political traditions are just beginning to develop. A Pashtun tribal leader told me that a "problem among Afghan politicians is that they do not tell the truth." It's a political system so new that that needed to be said out loud.

The Pashtun tribal leader was one of a number of people that Amin arranged for me to interview. Tribalism is another thing that makes Afghanistan hard to understand. We Americans are probably too tribal to grasp the subtlety of Afghan tribal concepts.

The Pashtun tribal leader was joined by a Turkmen tribal leader who has a Ph.D. in sociology. I asked the Turkmen tribal leader about the socioeconomic, class, and status aspects of Afghan tribalism.

"No tribe is resented for wealth," he said. So, right off the bat, Afghans show greater tribal sophistication than Americans. There is no Wall Street Tribe upon which the Afghan government can blame everything.

Even the worst of Afghan governments never acquired the special knack of pitting tribe against tribe that is vital to American politics—the Squishy Liberal Tribe vs. the Kick-Butt Tribe; the Indignantly Entitled Tribe vs. the Fed-Up Taxpayer Tribe; the Smug Tribe vs. the Wipe-That-Smirk-Off-Your-Face Tribe.

"We are all one nation," said the Pashtun tribal leader. "In the name of Afghan is included all the tribes of Afghanistan. Outsiders create divisions to serve their own interests." Better than having insiders create divisions to serve their own interests, President Obama take note.

"Are there land issues between the tribes?" I asked the Turkmen. He told me there are land issues between *everybody*. Land titles are a mess in Afghanistan, or, as the Turkmen put it with a nice Ph.D. turn of phrase, "Definition of ownership is originally ambiguous."

The situation is so confused that the Soviets, of all people, attempted to impose private property in Afghanistan. "They tried to change the law, but the period was too short. Afghanistan," the Turkmen said and laughed, "did not use the benefits of colonialism."

The problem in Afghanistan is really not so much land

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as water. It's a dry country with ample amounts of water running through it but not to good enough effect. "We have a law to distribute water but not to *manage* water," the Turkmen said. This lack of management combines with the age-old conflicts between nomads with their need for watered pastures and farmers with their need for irrigation. "The Turkmen," said the Turkmen, "settle close to the desert. The Pashtuns settle close to the source of the water." Downstream and upstream. It's the plot of *Chinatown*. If you don't understand Afghanistan, blame Robert Towne.

Both the Pashtun tribal leader and the Turkmen tribal leader were unenthusiastic about the word "tribal" and felt that "ethnic groups" is a better way to describe the differences among Afghans.

I held forth on American patriotism, how it had to do with our own ethnic groups and the attempt to give American immigrants of the late 19th and early 20th centuries a sense of nationhood. The tribal leaders understood exactly what I meant, which is more than I can say for our NATO allies on the subject of American patriotism.

"Fifty years ago," the Turkmen said, "things in Afghanistan were going in the same direction as the U.S. growth of patriotism. These systems were disturbed by the events of the last 30 years. Also, the geographical location of Afghanistan is not helpful to building national ideals. The focal points of the tribes are outside the country."

But not far enough outside. The Turkmen have their heartland in Turkmenistan, the Uzbeks in Uzbekistan, the Tajiks in Tajikistan and Iran. Even the Pashtuns, who are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, comprising about 40 percent of the population, count Peshawar in the Northwest Territories of Pakistan as their cultural capital. And the language spoken by most educated Afghans, Dari, is a dialect of Persian.

It is as if, around the time Emma Lazarus was penning "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free," Dublin and Naples and Warsaw and Minsk had been moved—complete with every palace, slum, monument, gutter, priest, princeling, bum, thug, and man-at-arms—to Ellis Island, and all of America's schools had started teaching their lessons in French.

Nonetheless Afghan patriotism obtains. Maybe because, as the Turkmen tribal leader pointed out, every "old country" to which an Afghan ethnic might turn manages—somewhat extraordinarily—to be a worse place than Afghanistan.

There's that and what the Pashtun tribal leader had to say: "If Afghanistan is divided why do we keep defeating outsiders?" He went on in that vein, like Lincoln but with a thousand more years of history to go on, dating back to the 12th-century outsider-defeating Afghan empire of Alauddin Husain, known as "the World-Burner." In the Pashtun's words, "A divided country cannot win."

Earlier in the day I'd heard a mullah become heated on the subject of ethnocentric politics. He accused a politician in the Karzai government of being a "national traitor" for doing what might be called playing the Charlie Rangel card.

The politician is a member of the Hazara tribe (the Afghan politician that is, though I'm sure Charlie Rangel would be glad to claim Hazara blood if it got him a tribal casino in New York's 15th congressional district). "Why I called him a national traitor," said the mullah, "is because he said he would shed his blood in favor of Hazaras. Instead of saying this was a judicial matter, he said it was a fighting matter. He broke his constitutional obligation."

The mullah represents another thing that makes Afghanistan hard to understand for Americans, although only for elite Americans who've had prestigious schooling and hold advanced opinions about everything. We ordinary Americans, far from such centers of heathen unbelief as the Brookings Institution, get the drift of a deeply religious polity.

I interviewed two mullahs at once, which might have been awkward as they were opposite types, but they seemed fond of each other and the quieter mullah even took a few notes while the more voluble mullah was talking.

The quiet mullah was quietly dressed and modestly bearded, his close-cut hair topped with a simple turban. He was immediately recognizable as "mainstream." I don't mean he was hopelessly mainstream to the post-religious point like some American clergy. I'd compare him to a solid Methodist or Presbyterian or picket fence Baptist, not unwilling to make his sermons socially relevant but no Kumbaya singing.

"Preaching isn't limited to the mosque," he said and told me how he spends time sitting with shopkeepers, listening to complaints about price gouging and talking about the Islamic view of these matters.

It is, by the way, things like price gouging that the Taliban casts itself as a defender against—the free market being one more of modernity's villains.

The quiet mullah talked about peace, not harping on its somewhat obvious convenience for individuals, but speaking of "the importance of peace to *Islam*." There's something more than mortal men at stake in peace—God demands it.

Along with peace, the mullah said, one of the most frequent topics of his sermons is leadership. Two of the criteria that the quiet mullah gave for political leadership would eliminate most U.S. politicians, "Be educated. Know the society." But the first criterion was to be Muslim.

The more voluble mullah explained, "Since the time of Adam until now there are four books from God." (Muslims,

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like Jews, divide the Pentateuch from the rest of the Old Testament.) "This is our constitution."

It's a little long, I suppose—even longer than the proposed EU constitution. But there are worse documents by which to live and govern—the proposed EU constitution for example.

Being a person who believes in God-given rights, I don't find a God-given constitution very disturbing. But some Americans—Americans involved in Afghan policy—apparently do. The next night I had dinner with the governor of a province that has its share of Taliban troubles. Talking about the hindrances he faces in getting assistance from the United States, the governor protested against something that he must have been told by some American, that there is a "ban on religion" in the U.S. Constitution.

"Disarm the Taliban," the governor said. "Take the Islamic weapon away from them." He wasn't talking about secularization.

This more voluble mullah was a splendid figure, a big man in a bright white *shalwar kameez* with a magnificence of beard in elaborate curls and a turban that looked as if it would take all night to unwind and all day to wind up again. He was an evangelical. I say that in the original complimentary Gospel way. (I'm low church Protestant on my mother's side.) I was swept up with his eloquence before its translation arrived. He was concerned that I'd only made it three-quarters of the way through the four books from God since the time of Adam. I was concerned that if I spent another 20 minutes with him I'd be in trouble with my parish priest.

Bashardost has something of the look of a young Ralph Nader, with that Nader gleam of indignation in his eyes and that Nader tendency to pull out thick sheaves of documentation concerning each subject he's indignant about.

I asked both mullahs about the idea of a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West. The quiet mullah thought there might be some truth in the notion, arising from three things: inappropriate behavior of Muslims, materialism (in the metaphysical sense) of non-Muslims, and mutual ignorance.

"Maybe," I volunteered, "the real clash of civilizations is between people who believe in God and people who don't."

The voluble mullah said, "There are those who don't believe in God. Fortunately neither Muslims or Afghans or Americans are among them." I hope he's not being too optimistic about the last-named. (Later I would get a more dismissive answer to the clash of civilizations question from a member of the Afghan parliament. He said, "Chinese, Muslims, Jews, Europeans—they work together in international finance markets every day.")

As the mullahs were departing an Afghan journalist gestured toward the more prepossessing of the two. "He's a drone problem," said the journalist. "They see the clothes and the turban from up in the air and they think, 'Taliban!' And he *is* like Taliban, but on the good side."

Yet someone in Afghanistan must think the Taliban on the other side are good for something too. Otherwise there wouldn't be an "Afghan issue."

The Taliban offers bad law—chopping off hands, stoning desperate housewives, the usual things. Perhaps you have to live in a place that has had no law for a long time—since the Soviets invaded 31 years ago—before you welcome bad law as an improvement.

An Afghan civil society activist, whose work has put him under threat from the Taliban, admitted, "People picked Taliban as the lesser of evils." He explained that lesser of evils with one word, "stability."

A woman member of the Afghan parliament said that it was simply a fact that the Taliban insurgency was strongest "where the government is not providing services." Rule of law being the first service a government must provide.

The member of parliament who laughed at the clash of civilizations laughed as well at what had passed for rule of law in Afghanistan. "Sure Afghanistan is unruly," he said. "Afghans don't like rules. No one likes rules. And that is what we have been—*ruled*. We have been *ruled*, not *governed*."

A journalist for Radio Azadi said, "Afghans were happy *in principle* that Americans brought peace and democracy. But when rival tribes began to use the U.S. to crush each other, the attitude of the Afghan people changed."

Afghans think Americans have sided with the wrong people. It's not that Afghans think Americans have sided with the wrong people in a systematic, strategic, or calculated way. It's just that we came to a place that we didn't know much about, where there are a lot of sides to be on, and we started siding with this side and that side and the other side. We were bound to wind up on the wrong side sometimes.

We're outsiders in Afghanistan, and this is Occam's razor for explaining the Taliban. Imagine if America were a country beset with all sorts of intractable difficulties. Or don't imagine it—America *is* a country beset with all sorts of intractable difficulties. Our government is out of control, wantonly interfering in every aspect of our private lives and

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heedlessly squandering our national treasure at a time when Americans are suffering grave economic woes. Meanwhile vicious tribal conflicts are being fought for control of America's culture and way of life. (I've been watching Fox News.)

What if some friendly, well-meaning, but very foreign power, with incomprehensible lingo and outrageous clothes, were to arrive on our shores to set things right? What if it were Highland Scots? There they go marching around wearing skirts and purses and ugly plaids, playing their hideous bagpipe music, handing out haggis to our kiddies and offending our sensibilities with a lack of BVDs under their kilts. Maybe they do cut taxes, lower the federal deficit, eliminate the Department of Health and Human Services, and the EPA, give people jobs at their tartan factories and launch a manhunt for Harry Reid and the UC Berkeley faculty. We still wouldn't like them.

The Pashtun tribal leader said, "I tell my own tribesmen to not support the Taliban, but they don't listen. They see the Taliban as fighting invaders."

The Radio Azadi journalist said, "When people felt they were dishonored, they needed revenge. The Taliban gave them revenge."

To fully sympathize with the dishonor an Afghan might feel, foreign government, U.N. and NGO aid agencies must be considered. Myriad of them operate in Afghanistan, staffed by people from around the globe. So it's not just that you've got Highland Scots marching in hairy-kneed formations up and down your cul-de-sac. Many of the most ordinary functions of your society have been taken over by weird strangers. When you need a flu shot or a dog license or a permit to burn leaves, you have to go see Bulgarians and Bolivians and Nigerians and Fiji Islanders.

Afghanistan's minister of education, Farooq Wardak, is no friend of the Taliban, but he did sound like he might be a recruit for the Tea Party. "I am absolutely unhappy with the U.S. role in Afghan education," he said. "Zero percent of U.S. aid to Afghan education is spent through the Afghan government."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because the Ministry of Education is not certified by USAID because no one from USAID has evaluated me or my ministry in the two years that I've held the job." Without the evaluation he can't get the certification.

He said that the U.S. government wanted to spend money on a program called "Community-Based Education." But that was a program the ministry had developed when the Taliban was attacking girls' schools across Afghanistan. It was a way to provide, he said, "covert education for girls. Now we need overt schools."

The U.S. government also wants to spend money, he complained, on "accelerated teacher training" when what Afghanistan needs is just plain teacher training. "This accelerated training leaves no bricks and mortar behind. You are spending U.S. tax dollars building something taxpayers can't see." His pocket critique of U.S. aid: "Everything is air, nothing is on the ground." I didn't have the heart to tell him about No Child Left Behind.

But the Taliban isn't winning much love either—otherwise we and our NATO allies would have already gone the way of the Soviets. The civil society activist had a very Afghan insult for the Taliban: "The Taliban has the power to kill and people still don't like them."

Radio Liberty's Pakistan bureau, which broadcasts in Pashto, had just run a story about the Taliban being as clumsy as the United States in dealing with tribalism—as clumsy but much more brutal. Unable to penetrate Pashtun tribal hierarchies the Taliban had, according to the report, begun killing tribal elders, with more than a thousand murdered so far.

"The older tribal leaders are everyone's target," the woman MP said. She also described how the Taliban, in areas under its control, go to villagers and demand, "Son or money." This insistence on either payoff or cannon fodder (drone fodder, I suppose) must undercut the Taliban's reputation for incorruptibility. But corruption in the Afghan government remains a raw material of insurgency.

As I mentioned, there's a lot of security in Kabul. The only place I saw that lacked any security—not a gun or a goon to be seen—was at the office of Ramazan Bashardost, a Shia MP running for reelection to parliament. He has a reputation for fanatical opposition to corruption. And, actually, he doesn't have an office, he refuses to have an office. Instead he has a tent pitched across the street from the parliament building, a large, simple nomad's tent staked in an empty lot and without so much as a carpet on the stony ground.

Bashardost has something of the look of a young Ralph Nader, with that Nader gleam of indignation in his eyes and that Nader tendency to pull out thick sheaves of documentation concerning each subject he's indignant about.

He had been in parliament before. He quit over what might seem a fine point. "I left parliament because Karzai said salaries should run through September when parliament had ended in May."

He had also been minister of planning. "I left the Ministry of Planning for my values," he said. He pointed to the pavement between his tent and the fortified parliament building. The four-lane avenue was completely torn up, littered in construction machinery and nearly impassable. "We are three years into a six-month road project."

Asked to summarize corruption in Afghanistan, he said, "It is a mafia economy disguised as a market economy."

Not that Bashardost is at all like Ralph Nader in his attitude toward a market economy. He has a Ph.D. in econom-

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ics and believes Afghanistan should be using private investment for development rather than international aid.

But, he said, "Afghans hate a 'market economy' because it equals corruption." (Being fluent in English he put market economy into phonetic quotation marks. He did the same with democracy.) "Afghans hate 'democracy' because democracy equals power of the warlords, equals power of corruption, equals no rule of law."

If Americans claim not to understand Afghan corruption, we're lying. Bribery has been a dominant part of our foreign policy in Afghanistan, the way it's been a dominant part of everyone's foreign policy in Afghanistan including al Qaeda's. What we Americans don't understand about Afghan corruption is why it's so transparent, just a matter of openly taking money. Don't the Afghans know that you should take bribes indirectly—by collecting publicity, popularity, public recognition, prestige, influence, and, most of all, power? Then big corporations put you on their boards of directors and *that's* when you get the money. Meanwhile you've been riding in government cars, flying on government planes, eating out of the government pork barrel (lamb barrel in Afghanistan), so why worry about payoffs up front?

Afghans have failed to move their corruption from the Rod Blagojevich model, which we all deplore, to the Barack Obama model, which we all admire.

How can we know what America should do in Afghanistan? I've returned fully informed on this subject as well. We should stay. The member of parliament who dismissed the clash of civilizations said, "It's like buying a beautiful home somewhere and letting your neighborhood deteriorate."

Really, seriously, we should stay. Otherwise, Ramazan Bashardost said, "You'll see Chinese soldiers in the street. We have a border with China. They're a very rich country. We're very poor people—in a most strategic region."

We should leave. The Pashtun tribal leader said, "We don't have war. What we have is instability. Armies create instability. If you try this for 20 more years you'll never succeed."

We should do both. One of the Radio Azadi journalists said, "There's the same feeling in Afghanistan as there is in the U.S. We worry about the U.S. staying, and we worry about the U.S. leaving."

The Afghan people are pro-American. The woman MP said, "We say, 'Our enemy is their enemy.'"

The Afghan people are anti-American. Ramazan Bashardost said, "Frankly, people are generally against the U.S." But he tries to argue with them. "I say U.S. troops are in Afghanistan for values, not for oil—there is not enough of it."

We should talk to the Taliban. The Pashtun tribal leader said, "Accept the fact that we cannot eliminate all Taliban from Afghanistan."

We shouldn't talk to the Taliban. The governor said, "Talks further strengthen the enemy's position."

The Afghan government can be reformed from within. The governor said, "Blaming corruption is just a way to put blame on others for our own shortcomings. Internal strategies are needed to strengthen military and civil society."

The Afghan government can't be reformed from within. Bashardost proposed something like General MacArthur did in Japan after World War II.

Poverty is the root of Afghanistan's problems. Bashardost said, "We are ready to support you for three hundred years. *If* we have electricity. *If* we have a life."

Poverty is not the root of Afghanistan's problems. "Or Haiti would be the most terroristic country in the world," the governor said.

There must be *something* in Afghanistan that we've got right. There is. Radio Azadi, the Afghan bureau of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, is on the air 12 hours a day, seven days a week, half the time in Pashto, half the time in Dari. What Radio Azadi does is known as "surrogate broadcasting," meaning the content is Afghan-produced as a way for Afghans to get news and views in a place where otherwise they have to be delivered mostly face-to-face. And there is no agenda except to be factual (although facts are an agenda item if you care about freedom, which is what Azadi means in Dari).

Radio Azadi's bureau chief, and my host in Kabul, Amin Mudaqiq, has 120 staff members and freelancers. They produce news bulletins, news in depth, and features on social, political, and economic topics plus a couple of hours a day of Afghan music and even some comedy: "Police announced today that all the people who have passed their driver's license test must now learn to drive."

A missing persons program, "In Search of a Loved One," tries to reunite families separated by decades of chaos. A medical program is hosted by doctors with eminent specialists, often from overseas, as guests. "Azadi and Listeners" is devoted to getting individuals individual responses from government ministries.

The call-in shows are popular. On a day when I was in the studio Afghanistan's minister of communications and minister of the interior were taking random phoners, trying to clear up confusion about a confusing-sounding system of national ID cards. I don't think it's likely that the head of the FCC and a member of President Obama's cabinet would spend two hours in a Spartan, airless broadcast booth talking with people who are unable to read through a form-filling process and suggesting work-arounds when local government corruption is encountered.

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The quiet mullah told me that the day before an elderly religious scholar had asked for help buying a radio so that Azadi could be listened to in his mosque.

The Pashtun tribal leader said, "Azadi is doing very well because they are telling the facts." He griped that other media were insensitive to religion and culture.

The civil society activist thought that wisdom and social relationships were best established in person, but second best was radio. "Radio can pass wisdom," he said.

The woman MP told me about how, after the fall of the Taliban, Radio Azadi had conducted four hours a week of open political debate. "The Afghans *got it*," she said. She praised Azadi's "diversity of opinion" and the fact that it sometimes has "the government getting upset."

"Even the U.S. ambassador is afraid of our show," an Azadi journalist told me with a big smile.

"Any feeling of censorship from the U.S.?" I asked Amin.

"We haven't felt any," he said.

"A good channel," the minister of education called it. "An important institution. I've never had the feeling it was unnecessarily taking sides in the Afghan conflict. It maintains its impartiality."

"I wasn't sure what you'd hear from the minister," a Radio Azadi journalist told me later. "We've been critical of him."

The MP to whom I'd talked about clashing civilizations and deteriorating neighborhoods was a bit surprised at America's sponsoring Azadi, the more so, I think, because he's an American. That is, he lived for a long time in America where he spent ten years as a commercial airline pilot.

"America," he said, not without pride, "is spending money for you to express your opinions—not to twist your opinions but to *express* your opinions."

Ramazan Bashardost's only complaint about Radio Azadi was that he wasn't on it often enough. He was reminded that, only recently, he had been named by Radio Azadi "Person of the Year."

"Yes," he said and apologized for bringing too much documentation to radio interviews.

"One positive point in Afghanistan is media," he said. "And the only positive point in Afghanistan is media."

Even the Taliban calls in to Radio Azadi—to argue with the hosts and guests.

"We know you are funded by the U.S. Congress," a Taliban spokesman told Amin. "But we judge you by your deeds."

"The Taliban call to argue—this is *good*," said the woman MP.

"The Taliban fights the U.S. militarily," said the airline pilot MP, "but uses the U.S. [funded] media to express themselves." He chuckled. "I say to them, 'If this system is bad, you are using it! When you had your radio, would you let *us* call in?'" He saw the Taliban as caught in a trap by the logic of freedom. "This is a format that must be expanded."

The governor thought the Taliban itself might accidentally expand it. He recalled the days before Radio Azadi, during Taliban rule, when the only outside media was the BBC Afghan service. "The Taliban told people that they would go to hell if they listened to the BBC. Then *everyone* listened."

There was one other point that people in Kabul agreed on. Whatever it is that America does in Afghanistan, America should proceed with wisdom. The governor told a story about wisdom.

There was a student who had been studying for many years at a madrassa. He had memorized the Koran and learned all the lessons his teacher taught. One day he went to his teacher and said, "I am ready to leave and go be a mullah."

His teacher said, "I think you should stay here for a few more years."

"Why?" asked the student. "Is there some additional degree or higher certificate that I will get?"

"No," said the teacher, "all you will get is wisdom."

"But I'm ready to be a mullah now," said the student. And he left the madrassa and wandered from village to village looking for a mosque where he could be the prayer-leader.

Finally the student came to a village where a corrupt old mullah was using the mosque as a stall for his cow. The student was outraged. He gathered the villagers together and told them, "I have studied at a madrassa. I have memorized the Koran. It is a great sacrilege for your mullah to use the mosque as a stall for his cow."

The villagers beat him up.

The student limped back to the madrassa and told his teacher what had happened. The teacher said, "Follow me." They went back to the village where the mullah was using the mosque as a stall.

The teacher gathered the villagers together and told them, "I see you have a beautiful cow being kept in your mosque. It must be a very blessed animal. And I hear the cow belongs to your mullah. He must be a very holy man. In fact, I think that this cow is so blessed and your mullah is so holy that if you were to take one hair from the cow's hide and one hair from the mullah's beard and rub them together, you would be assured of paradise."

The villagers ran into the mosque and began plucking hairs from the cow's hide. The cow started to buck and kick and it bolted from the mosque and disappeared. Then the villagers ran to the mullah's house and began plucking hairs from the corrupt old mullah's beard. And they tugged and they yanked so hard at the mullah's beard that he had a heart attack and died.

"You see," said the teacher to the student, "no cow in the mosque and a need for a new mullah—*that* is wisdom." ♦

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Cheapskating to Victory

Scott Walker is poised to cash in on his frugality in the Wisconsin governor's race

By Stephen F. Hayes

Milwaukee

When Barack Obama visited here on August 16, the state's top Democrats greeted him at the airport. Representative Gwen Moore was there. So was Governor Jim Doyle. Senator Russ Feingold was there and said he had no concerns about appearing with the increasingly unpopular president. "Absolutely none," he said. "I'm pleased to stand with this president any time and anywhere and defend what we've done and what we're doing."

But there was one conspicuous absence at General Mitchell International Airport that morning: Milwaukee mayor Tom Barrett, who is running for governor.

Odd. The White House worked hard to recruit Barrett to run to succeed Doyle, and one of the two events Obama was in Wisconsin to attend was a fundraiser for Barrett. The other was a speech at ZBB Energy that Barrett had helped set up.

Milwaukee mayor Tom Barrett announcing his gubernatorial candidacy

NEWSCOM

But not only was Barrett not at the airport, he skipped the event at ZBB Energy. Obama didn't even mention Barrett's name at the beginning of his 11-minute speech when he acknowledged everyone else including "Eric," ZBB's CEO who gave him a tour. Barrett apparently did find time to make the fundraiser Obama held in his honor, which raised a reported $325,000, but that event was not open to the press.

Barrett was an early supporter of Obama's $862 billion stimulus plan. "I do think it can help stem the downward spiral, and when we reach bottom we'll be able to climb out more easily," he told the *Business Journal of Milwaukee* shortly after the stimulus was passed in 2009. But the climb out has been anything but easy in Wisconsin or the rest of the country. Voters overwhelmingly believe the stimulus was ineffective and with this fall's midterm elections shaping up to be a referendum on the size and scope of government, few elected Democrats are defending it.

Republicans, on the other hand, are eager to talk about the stimulus. As Obama spoke at the fundraiser, Barrett's likely Republican opponent for governor, Scott Walker, was across town discussing the spending with supporters at a rally in a parking lot under the Hoan Bridge near Lake Michigan.

The Obama administration has given Wisconsin stimulus money to fund a high-speed train between Milwaukee and Madison. Barrett and Governor Doyle embraced the project when it was announced, but in the months since, it has become incredibly unpopular. Walker believes that the state has higher priorities—chief among them repairing the Hoan Bridge, which connects the south side to downtown Milwaukee. Driving over the bridge is like going across a mile of rumble strips. Not long ago the city had to put

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netting on the underside of the bridge in order to catch debris as it falls from the structure.

Walker wants to stop the train and fix the bridge:

> We know that the massive government spending project that they're talking about—the one that Tom Barrett bases as the centerpiece of his economic development plan—will only create a mere 55 permanent jobs. That's more than $14.5 million per job. I think we can do a little better than that.

Not surprisingly, there was ample agreement among the 400 people who made time to attend a rally at 2:30 P.M. on a Monday.

"I think it's a stupid idea," says Yash Wadhwa, a civil engineer from Milwaukee. "It's a complete waste of money. If we can get five people to ride that train we'll be lucky. Nobody wants it except Jim Doyle and Tom Barrett."

Walker is one of the most compelling candidates running this election cycle. The son of a minister, he was elected Milwaukee County executive in the spring of 2002, in what the local newspaper called "the grand finale of a taxpayer uprising." The revolt came after a pension scandal in which county officials voted themselves millions of dollars in retirement payments. The compensation would have included a lump sum payout for Tom Ament, Walker's predecessor, as high as $2.3 million and annual payments of some $136,000 for life.

Scott Walker is advocating a 'Brown Bag Guide to Government'—'Don't spend more money than you have. Smaller government is better government. People create jobs, not government.'

Walker ran promising to overhaul county government. He promised to balance the budget, at the time some $3.5 million in the red. He promised to cut government spending. He promised to change the way the county does business. He started with his own salary. Since 2002, he has forgone more than $370,000.

Walker ran ads about his salary to kick off his campaign for governor. After telling viewers how much he'd given up, Walker laughs a bit. "My wife was like: What? But we believe that government spends too much money. And that included my salary."

Is it a gimmick? Of course. But talk to Wisconsin voters about the governor's race and Walker's decision to give back part of his salary is one of the first things they mention. The ad worked for two reasons: It is consistent with the way Walker has governed, and it's about real money.

Walker is not like Michael Bloomberg serving as New York's mayor for $1 a year. He's not wealthy, and with two teenage boys headed to college in the next five years family finances are tight. He drives a gray 1998 Saturn with 105,313 miles on it. Though cost is only part of the reason he hasn't sprung for a new car. "I drive it because it works," he says of his Saturn.

Walker is running for governor hoping to galvanize what he calls a "Brown Bag Movement." He visits workplaces around the state during lunch hour and after a short speech takes questions from the workers who show up to hear him. Every seat has a brown paper lunch bag with a short saying. "I have to brown bag it so I can pay Wisconsin's taxes" or "I'd be eating out if government wasn't gobbling up all of my money" or "Wisconsin is Tax Hell!"

It's cheesy, but, like the salary ad, it seems to be working. When I mentioned to a Washington-based political reporter that I was headed to Wisconsin to profile Walker, he said: "Oh, the Brown Bag guy."

Walker's speech at Worzella Publishing in Stevens Point is brief and straightforward. It is well summarized by the three-sentence "Brown Bag Guide to Government." "Don't spend more money than you have. Smaller government is better government. People create jobs, not government."

In rat-a-tat-tat fashion, Walker promises to eliminate obstacles to economic growth by cutting taxes, cutting red tape, and cutting the cost of "frivolous and out-of-control lawsuits." And he offers three other priorities: improving Wisconsin's "world-class education system," improving health care "but not the way they promise to in Washington," and improving the state's infrastructure.

Walker says the first thing he'd do as governor is sign a letter authorizing Wisconsin's attorney general to challenge the individual mandate in the new federal health care law.

Although he was not raised in a political family, Walker, 42, has been a conservative as long as he can remember. "I came of age in the 1980s, so there's no doubt President Reagan had an influence." When I asked him why he is a conservative, he responded, not surprisingly, with a simple answer: "Because I think that government's not the best place to get things done."

Walker has top Republicans around the country buzzing. The Republican Governor's Association has already spent heavily in Wisconsin and views the race as a top priority. Haley Barbour visited the state to raise money, and Tom Ridge and Jeb Bush have done events for the Walker campaign. Walker exchanges emails regularly with Newt Gingrich, who provides advice on both politics and policy.

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Walker says they struck up a relationship after he read Gingrich's book "last deer season."

This is how Scott Walker thinks. His is a common sense, back-to-basics conservatism that has served him well over the past eight years as county executive. Walker won reelection twice—in 2004 and 2008—in a county with a long history of progressive politics. Eight months before Barack Obama defeated John McCain in Milwaukee County with 67.5 percent of the vote, Walker defeated his opponent with 59 percent.

He was reelected because he has largely accomplished what he set out to accomplish. Milwaukee County today is running a surplus, even though the state government is running a record deficit. Walker has kept spending increases below the rate of inflation—his campaign calls this a de facto spending reduction. He has cut the county workforce by 20 percent. He privatized courthouse food services, housekeeping, and perimeter security. And for eight consecutive years he submitted budgets that did not raise property taxes.

"Scott's popularity has less to do with what he's saying and more to do with what he's done," says one national Republican strategist.

His opponents in previous elections have charged that Walker's spending cuts have diminished the quality of life in Milwaukee County. There have been emergency public pool closings. Some bus routes have been shortened, others eliminated. But Walker is not an easy villain. He almost never stops smiling, and he is preternaturally optimistic.

He's a less brash Chris Christie or a slightly goofier Mitch Daniels. But he shares with them a willingness to be blunt, even at the risk of angering his colleagues or constituents.

Walker and I discussed the Milwaukee County supervisor who became an overnight YouTube sensation after claiming that Arizona was not on the United States-Mexico border.

"She's not even the dumbest one," he said.

Later, at the Wisconsin State Fair, moments before he bit into a Krispy Kreme cheeseburger, Walker was asked how many of the county supervisors were dumber.

"About half," he quipped.

He was joking, of course, but he usually speaks directly, not fretting too much about the political impact of his words.

Scott Walker downs a Krispy Kreme cheeseburger.

THE WEEKLY STANDARD / STEPHEN F. HAYES

Graeme Zielinski, a former political reporter for the Milwaukee *Journal Sentinel* who left his job earlier this year to become the spokesman for the Wisconsin Democratic party, wants me to know that Walker's candidacy is based on lies and half-truths. "Generally, it's our position that Scott Walker isn't truthful about his record on just about anything."

"When Scott Walker was in the legislature, he voted several times for budgets that included studies on high speed rail," Zielinski explained. "If he was such an opponent of high speed rail, he wouldn't have been in a tough election fight before he brought it up. He's been a Johnny-come-lately to this."

As it happens, I'd just read the transcript of an editorial board meeting with the *Journal Sentinel* from 2002 featuring Walker and his first opponent for the county executive seat, Jim Ryan. The two men agreed on many of the urgent issues facing the county, but one major area of disagreement concerned infrastructure. Ryan favored funding for a rail-based system in Milwaukee County. Walker did not.

He made two arguments against it—priorities and costs. "There are an incredibly large number of other infrastructure-based projects on the table that directly tie in the economic development that far outweighs the seriousness of just this rail-based system." Walker was worried that federal subsidies would not cover the entire cost of the project and would, in any case, leave the county responsible for operating costs it could not afford. He makes exactly the same arguments today about high-speed rail.

So I pressed Zielinski about Walker's supposed votes for high-speed rail.

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"Was that one of those situations where he cast the vote for a huge budget so you can't separate it out?"

"Yeah," he acknowledged. "Absolutely."

"So is it your view that the principled thing to do would have been to vote 'no' on the overall budget because it included studies on high-speed rail?"

"Well, he—he took some affirmative votes in committee that allowed—procedurally allowed those studies to go forward."

That didn't sound like a big deal to me, but if the spokesman for the Democratic party thought enough of it to make it his leading critique of Walker, I wanted to know more. Zielinski said he would send me details about those votes and then shifted to a broader critique, attacking Walker from the right.

"On spending, he's increased spending by $380 million—more than any candidate in this race. On taxes, he raised taxes by 40 million bucks while he's been here."

I asked him about that number. "He raised taxes by 40 million bucks. The tax levy has gone up by $40 million."

Of course, those are two different claims. The first one is false; the second one is true. The tax levy has indeed increased, but only because the county board repeatedly raised taxes over Walker's veto. I pointed that out to Zielinski.

"He signed those budgets. He signed those budgets."

"But they were passed over his veto."

A four-second pause and then:

> Spending went up by 380 million bucks. And if his argument is "I couldn't do anything," then how can he do something about high-speed rail? "Well, I was helpless about increasing spending by 35 percent but I'm not helpless on high-speed rail." That doesn't square.

Zielinski then warmed to the theme of making Milwaukee County sound something like Rome, or at least Detroit. "The parks are in ruins. The county buildings are in ruins. Services are in ruins."

This continued for several minutes before I had a chance to ask him about Tom Barrett and President Obama's visit to Milwaukee. "Why would Barrett not show up to see the president?" I asked. "Did he have something better to do?"

"I, I, I've not—he's the mayor. I have no idea what the calculation was behind that."

"But that's weird, isn't it? The mayor of Milwaukee is running for governor, and he's not going to show up to greet the president?"

"There's plenty of footage of Tom Barrett and Barack Obama. Tom Barrett was one of the first people to support Barack Obama's run for president. There's no shortage—if Republicans need little sound bites or clips of Tom Barrett—he's not running away from the president."

"He's not? Why wouldn't he show up if he's not running away from the president?"

"I have no idea. I was working on something—when Sarah Palin comes in—Scott Walker was at a rally with Sarah Palin a year ago at the State Fair Park. When Sarah Palin comes in he runs around the state holding hands with her. But I don't know the answer. I didn't handle the schedule this morning. I was meeting with the [Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee] on something, so if you want an actual, factual answer to that, I can try to get one for you."

I emailed Zielinski to follow up, and he responded: "There is no official statement on Tom's schedule Monday." I also never got anything supporting his claims about the committee votes Walker cast in favor of high-speed rail projects.

Beyond the difficulty Democrats are having attacking Walker, his message is clearly resonating with Wisconsin voters.

Before the Hoan Bridge rally, I was talking to Steve Butler, an exterminator who showed up wearing a blue work shirt that featured a patch for his employer, "AAA Pest Management." When I asked Butler how he found the time to attend a rally in the middle of a workday, he told me he was "between jobs." I thought he meant unemployed, but he explained that he was literally taking a break between two extermination jobs that afternoon.

When we finished, a man in a red shirt and jeans approached tentatively. "I'm one of those guys you thought he was," he said as the first speaker started. We agreed to talk afterwards.

When the rally ended, he approached again. "Let's talk over there," he said, motioning away from the crowd. When we were alone, he explained that he had been let go in May as a sales rep for a local manufacturing company.

> The first thing I did was get rid of my cable, my newspapers, my landline. We can't afford to go out and eat. We started doing our shopping at Aldi's [a local discount grocery store]. We had to really think about how we were spending our money. That's what Scott does. So it makes sense to me when Scott talks about bringing a lunch in a brown bag. You would think that it wouldn't because I lost my job. But it appeals to me even more since I lost my job.

We chatted for several minutes. When we were done, I asked him if I could use his name and explained that it's much better to be able to attach a name to quotations. He was hesitant, and so I told him that it wasn't necessary if he wasn't comfortable. He thought about it again before replying.

"Yeah," he said. "This is important. It's Curt Yorkey." ♦

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Maugham's the Word

Popular and literary and vice versa

BY TERRY TEACHOUT

Once upon a time a serious novelist could be very, very popular. Then something came unstuck, and now the appearance of a novel on the bestseller list is generally taken by highbrows as proof of its artistic frivolity. They've got a point: You don't have to spend more than a minute or two in an airport bookstore to be stupefied by the sheer crappiness of today's popular fiction. But it took a long time to get from *David Copperfield* to *The Da Vinci Code*, and along the way a number of writers whose distinction used to be taken for granted got left out in the cold.

One of them was W. Somerset Maugham, who was both greatly admired and hugely successful throughout much of his long career, first as a playwright and then as the author of novels and short stories that won him the praise of critics and colleagues ranging from George Orwell to Theodore Dreiser. Dreiser described *Of Human Bondage*, the book that put Maugham on the map in 1915, as "a novel of the utmost importance." For many years after that, his critical standing seemed as solid as the pound sterling. At the same time, he was also one of the top-selling authors of the 20th century, and many of his novels, plays, and stories were later turned into big-budget movies that starred the likes of Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, Errol Flynn, Greta Garbo, John Gielgud, Leslie Howard, Gene Kelly, Charles Laughton, Tyrone Power, and George Sanders. In one of them, *The Razor's Edge*, Maugham himself was played by Herbert Marshall, and starting in 1948 he made on-camera appearances as the urbane host of a well-received series of British anthology films based on his short stories.

The Secret Lives of Somerset Maugham
by Selina Hastings
Random House, 640 pp., $35

W. Somerset Maugham, circa 1960

GEORGE KONIG / REX USA, COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION

In time, Maugham made enough money from his writings to buy a villa on the French Riviera, fill it with a choice collection of Impressionist and post-Impressionist paintings, and travel wherever and whenever he liked in search of material for his work. Such good fortune never goes unforgiven, and by the '30s he found himself on the receiving end of a string of critical onslaughts, the most brutal of which was a 1946 *New Yorker* essay in which Edmund Wilson gave him the shortest possible shrift:

> It has happened to me from time to time to run into some person of taste who tells me that I ought to take Somerset Maugham seriously, yet I have never been able to convince myself that he was anything but second-rate. . . . Mr. Maugham, I cannot help feeling, is not, in the sense of "having the métier," really a writer at all.

Wilson was then one of America's most influential literary tastemakers, and the fact (unknown to his readers) that he had not read any of Maugham's major novels did not diminish the deadly effectiveness of his assault on the man who wrote them. By the time of his death in 1965, Maugham had become a kind of cultural unperson, and, notwithstanding the subsequent rehabilitative efforts of such devotees as Joseph Epstein, his reputation has yet to recover from the slings and arrows of the critics who brought him low.

Now Selina Hastings, a British literary journalist whose previous books include biographies of Evelyn Waugh and Nancy Mitford, is seeking to persuade a new generation of readers that Somerset Maugham deserves a second chance. To this end she has written a biography of Maugham, the first one to be based on his hitherto-inaccessible correspondence. It contains information that has been ballyhooed as scandalous

Terry Teachout, drama critic of the Wall Street Journal *and chief culture critic of* Commentary, *wrote the libretto for* The Letter, *an opera by Paul Moravec based on W. Somerset Maugham's 1927 play that was premiered last summer by the Santa Fe Opera.*

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in the British tabloids, though most of the dirtiest dirt had already been published (albeit with less detail) in Ted Morgan's *Maugham*, which came out three decades ago. But Hastings is refreshingly disinclined to pass on rumor in the guise of fact, and while *The Secret Lives of Somerset Maugham* is no masterpiece of the biographer's art—Hastings lacks flair and isn't much of a critic—it tells you just about everything you could possibly want to know about its subject, including a good many things that he would have blanched to see in print.

It long ago ceased to be a secret that Maugham had plenty to hide. Not only was he an avidly practicing homosexual at a time when the British police unhesitatingly clapped such folk in jail with alarming regularity, but he was what we have since learned to call a sexual tourist, a man who traveled far and wide to gratify his appetites, which extended, it appears, to having sex with teenage boys. "I do not believe," he wrote in 1935, "that there is any man, who if the whole truth were known of him would not seem a monster of depravity." To learn from Hastings that he believed "the most memorable sexual experience of his life" to have been "a moonlit night on a sampan with a boy in Malaya" may cause many modern-day readers to regard him as exactly that.

Such confidences, however, were not for the *hoi polloi.* Maugham never wrote about his sexuality for publication save with the utmost discretion. On the other hand, virtually every other aspect of his life sooner or later made its way into his work, and the more one learns about him, the sadder he seems. Orphaned at 10 and raised by a philistine country vicar, he was on the short side and sensitive about it, believed himself to be physically unattractive, and had a stammer that he was never able to bring fully under control. After his writing made him rich, he found it hard to believe that anyone could appreciate him, save for his money.

"I have most loved people who cared little or nothing for me," he wrote in *The Summing Up*, his 1938 memoir, "and when people have loved me I have been embarrassed."

That such a creature should have longed to marry and lead a life of Victorian respectability is anything but surprising, given the high price that he could easily have paid for doing otherwise. In time he acquired a wife and sired a daughter, but Maugham was incapable of suppressing his sexual nature, and his short-lived marriage to a greedy divorcée brought him much misery. Nor was his longest-lasting emotional tie, to a ne'er-do-well American named Gerald Haxton, any more successful, though Maugham adored his dissolute companion and was devastated when he died. The truth was that he was not cut out for any kind of intimate relationship—a fact of which he was all too aware.

Such good fortune never goes unforgiven, and by the '30s he found himself on the receiving end of a string of critical onslaughts.

Maugham was no less realistic about the value of his own work. "I know just where I stand: in the very front row of the second-raters," he claimed. Yet he made such resourceful fictional use of his complex and eventful private life as to overcome his natural limitations to a degree almost without precedent in English literature. On occasion he even managed to lift himself by sheer force of will into the first rank: *Cakes and Ale*, the ruefully funny 1930 novel in which he told of his youthful attachment to a promiscuous but lovable actress, is masterly, as are a dozen or so of his neatly turned, lethally cynical short stories. He was also a gifted autobiographer and travel writer, and *The Summing Up*, his unexpectedly candid memoir, is one of the best things he ever wrote.

These, however, are all small-scale achievements, by no means to be despised—*Cakes and Ale* is one of the finest comic novels of the 20th century—but limited in their scope and significance. None of Maugham's other novels is as impressive as *Cakes and Ale*, though some of them, especially *The Razor's Edge* and *The Narrow Corner*, contain good things. *Of Human Bondage*, the *Bildungsroman* of his unhappy childhood and youth that is his most ambitious and explicitly autobiographical work of fiction, is lumpily episodic, pedestrian in style, and disfigured by a shy-making streak of self-pity that he later learned to keep out of sight. Novelettish clichés ("He leaned over her, and his heart went pit-a-pat") are sprinkled throughout his oeuvre, just as his lesser short stories hinge on "surprises" likely to strike contemporary readers as contrived.

You won't come away from *The Secret Lives of Somerset Maugham* suspecting any of this. Hastings is a true believer, and the weakest passages in her book are the ones in which she endeavors to persuade the reader that Maugham was a better writer than he really was. These mostly take the form of enthusiastic assertion: *Of Human Bondage* is "extraordinarily compelling" and "a major achievement," *The Trembling of a Leaf* "triumphant," *The Razor's Edge* "supremely accomplished." Even those who, like me, regard Maugham as underrated may feel that Hastings is overegging the pudding.

More to the point is her description of Hugh Walpole, a once popular novelist whom Maugham mercilessly guyed in *Cakes and Ale* and to whom Hastings refers in passing as "possessed of the fatal facility of the second-rate." Much the same thing might be said of Maugham himself. Too many of his novels and stories are little better than smooth hackwork churned out to keep his golden pot boiling. He liked to speak of money as "a sixth sense without which you could not make the most of the other five." It's a good line, but not the best possible reason to write literary fiction.

At one point Hastings quotes Evelyn Waugh as having praised Maugham's "supreme adroitness and ease. . . . I

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do not know of any living writer who seems to have his work so much under control." But she neglects to cite the rest of the passage, in which Waugh went on to say that he regarded this latter aspect of Maugham's work as "both a triumph and a limitation," explaining that "this very diplomatic polish makes impossible for him any of those sudden transcendent flashes of passion and beauty which less competent novelists occasionally attain." Maugham himself knew that his writing lacked this latter quality, and he seems to have felt that his sexuality was at fault. In *Don Fernando*, a 1935 volume of reflections on the Spanish national character that is one of his least-appreciated books, he made the following observations apropos of El Greco, whom he took to be homosexual:

> I should say that a distinctive trait of the homosexual is a lack of deep seriousness over certain things that normal men take seriously. . . . He has small power of invention, but a wonderful gift of delightful embroidery. He has vitality, brilliance, but seldom strength. He stands on the bank, aloof and ironical, and watches the river of life flow on.

Maugham, who on another occasion described himself as having "small power of imagination," undoubtedly had himself in mind as well.

What made Maugham's work so popular, and what makes the best of it readable to this day, is not his prose style or his philosophical interests but his consummate grasp of the insufficiently respected art of plot-spinning. Not only did he know a good story when he heard one, but he knew how to turn an intriguing dinner-table anecdote into a sharply pointed tale of human fallibility. I learned how good his plots were when I turned one of his stage plays, *The Letter*, into an opera libretto. The language of the play was clankingly prosy—so much so that I had to rewrite virtually all of it. But the plot, which is based on the real-life story of a "respectable" married woman in British Malaya who murdered her lover, then claimed that he tried to rape her, was so well made that I left it almost entirely intact.

Leslie Howard, Bette Davis in 'Of Human Bondage,' 1934

COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION

What I learned from working on *The Letter* was that Maugham is, above all, a writer of situation and event, one whose characters sometimes say interesting things but rarely say them in a memorable way. Small wonder that Dreiser, the worst stylist ever to produce major novels, esteemed him. Like Dreiser, Maugham is a writer who tells us what happened, and the language in which he tells it is always of secondary interest to the occurrence itself. It stands to reason, then, that his journalist's curiosity and unusually wide experience (he trained as a physician before becoming a full-time writer and served as a British spy during World War I) would have worked to his benefit.

One of his stories is actually called "Raw Material," and he spent much of his adult life trolling the world for characters and anecdotes that he could weave into plots. "I have taken living people and put them into the situations, tragic or comic, that their characters suggested," he admitted in *The Summing Up*. "I might well say that they invented their own stories."

Not surprisingly, he is best when most straightforward, and the more simply he writes, the easier it is to see the glints of wit in his plain-Jane prose. ("To write simply," he observed in *Don Fernando*, "is as difficult as to be good.") The pose of cool detachment from the follies of his fellow men that he cultivated after getting *Of Human Bondage* out of his system rarely failed to serve him well, never more so than in *Cakes and Ale*, whose first sentence, no matter how many times you read it, always takes you by delighted surprise: "I have noticed that when someone asks for you on the telephone and, finding you out, leaves a message begging you to call him up the moment you come in, and it's important, the matter is more often important to him than to you."

Was he a great writer? Hardly. But to have produced *Cakes and Ale*, *The Summing Up*, *Don Fernando*, and such stories as "The Alien Corn," "The Colonel's Lady," "The Outstation," "The Three Fat Women of Antibes," "Sanatorium," and "The Yellow Streak" (to name only a few) is no small achievement, at least not by the standards of mere mortals. "I have never pretended to be anything but a storyteller," he said. Perhaps not, but it is that very lack of pretension that makes him so attractive, and though I wouldn't trade him for Waugh or Joseph Conrad or Henry James, we could definitely use a few more such honest craftsmen on our bestseller lists. ♦

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B&A

Shouting the Blues

A color-coded breakdown of the American family.

BY EVE TUSHNET

The Kardashian clan (plus Ryan Seacrest)

JEFF VESPA / WIREIMAGE

In 1998, Fugees frontwoman and single mother Lauryn Hill scored a hit with her hip-hop ode to her son Zion, in which she described how the people around her had pressured her to abort him: "They said, 'Lauryn baby, use your head' / But instead I chose to use my heart. / Now the joy of my world is in Zion!"

Hill's voice won't be found in Naomi Cahn's and June Carbone's deeply flawed, intermittently important book. In fact, *Red Families v. Blue Families* contains virtually no voices representing alternatives to the elite lifestyle of contraception, college (and probably postgraduate) education, and late childbearing. The book is replete with numbers, but because it incorporates very little qualitative research—in which the voices behind the numbers might get a chance to explain themselves—it's impossible to gauge the accuracy of Cahn/Carbone's analyses of the reasons behind the American class-based marriage gap.

Red Families v. Blue Families
Legal Polarization and the Creation of Culture
by Naomi Cahn and June Carbone
Oxford, 304 pp., $29.95

Judging by my admittedly limited experience, *Red Families* offers a sanitized picture of elite family life—ignoring the degree to which shame, and abortion in response to shame, shapes elite young women's choices—and a distorted picture of underclass and lower middle-class family life, explaining class-based differences in out-of-wedlock childbearing and pregnancy as a result of lack of access to contraception, which is one of the very few explanations I think I've literally never heard from any lower-income woman.

Although Cahn/Carbone clearly want to offer solutions to the multiple and conflicting crises in American family structures, solutions which respect and can be accommodated by a wide variety of different communities and world views, they are ultimately unable to articulate or understand any alternative to what they've (somewhat crudely) decided to call the blue family model.

"Blue families," a term which they acknowledge has highly limited relevance to racial minorities who often follow "red family" models while voting Democratic, delay childbearing at least until the late twenties, often well into the thirty-something years. They contracept consistently and effectively, get pricey educations, and have abortion to back them up when even the most controlled birth control fails. (The abortion rates of blue states are higher than those of red states, though that difference does not fully explain the fact that out-of-wedlock childbirth rates are lower in prototypical blue states. If red staters contracepted as effectively as blue staters, and all other factors were held equal as of course they never are, the red states would still have more unwed mothers and fatherless children.) Although they can afford a lot of kids, the blue staters have very few: two, maybe one. Cahn/Carbone characterize this as privileging "investment" in children, quality over quantity.

Red families preach abstinence until marriage but practice divorce and unwed childbearing. They don't abort their children, but neither do they marry for life. They marry early and divorce much more than their blue state counterparts. They're also poorer, for the most part, and their income levels are pretty obviously both cause and symptom of their fractious family structure.

There are many good points to this analysis. Cahn/Carbone note how completely "abstinence until marriage" has been discarded at all levels of American society. It is not possible to address the needs of American families without first acknowledging that almost no one actually lives the way that, for example, the Roman Catholic Church thinks we should.

In their final and best chapter, Cahn/Carbone also offer a passionate call for a radical restructuring in how our economy accommodates parents and parents-to-be. The unionized factory jobs which stereotypically supported a breadwinner-homemaker family, where the spouses married right after high school, have been replaced by service-and-information-economy jobs which require highly specialized education and licensing: fields like cosmetology and medical-information processing. This volatile economy requires a much more flexible structure in which work, family, and education can interweave.

Red Families is frustratingly vague on how this interweaving and flex-

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ibility could actually work—and the authors have a depressingly unimaginative tendency to answer every question with "Let the government do it," as if the regulatory state has been the expert advocate for the needs and interests of the poor—but the book's willingness to call the basic structure of the American economy into question is deeply necessary. Cahn/Carbone point out the places where our economic and governmental structures have not caught up with the needs of contemporary American couples and their children.

But the many good things in *Red Families* are obscured by the authors' relentless, unsubtle framing of every question from within a blue-family mindset so deeply internalized that perhaps the authors themselves don't realize what they're doing. They don't want to come across as if they're telling Mississippians to abort more kids so they write this sentence, which opens the sixth chapter: "Contraception is the indispensable element of the blue family paradigm; abortion, in contrast, is the regrettable but necessary fallback." If you can tell the difference between "indispensable" and "necessary," you are a subtler thinker than I am.

And while they don't want to come across as if they're telling Alabamans what to value, they fail to articulate a worldview in which early childbearing is an accomplishment, a form of contributing to society, and abortion is a tragedy rather than a solution. Coerced and regretted abortions are entirely absent from their discussion, and again, no actual low-income men and women get a chance to describe their reasoning, and their hopes and fears and loves.

Meanwhile, the authors waste time and page count on simplistic psychologizing of traditionalists vs. modernists and conservatives vs. liberals, in which the righties lack the "flexible" morality, attuned to "context," of their lefty counterparts. I wonder whether self-proclaimed conservatives or liberals are most likely to be nuanced and attuned to context on the issues of torture, the death penalty, and spanking? These pop science descriptions of why people disagree with us are often comforting but rarely illuminating.

Class is the intersection of economic status and culture. It doesn't describe merely income level or purchasing power or "net worth." Cahn/Carbone are trying—genuinely, poignantly trying—to offer solutions to our country's family crises which respect the diversity of our beliefs. But they consistently view poor or nonelite Americans as simply elite Americans without the resources to act on the values they obviously share with the authors. And so they ignore the most important fact about class: It changes the definition of words. "Responsibility," a *Red Families* motif, is always used to mean postponing childbearing—and not, as it means to many nonelite women, accepting early childbearing and rejecting abortion.

There's a telling aside in the final chapter. Cahn/Carbone describe the 2008 Republican platform on work/family integration and add a sardonic parenthetical remark: "So long as [new regulations have] no negative impact on productivity." This might be the book's sole acknowledgment—and it's a dismissive one—that there may be trade-offs in life. For the rest, we are meant to believe that not merely in the long term, but even in the short, a massive expansion of government regulation and a campaign to get "red staters" to embrace the Pill, will have no adverse consequences. We are asked to believe that there is no tension between the economic and the spiritual. In *Red Families* the rich man always passes through the needle's eye.

Our family structures are shaped largely by economic pressures—but also, and importantly, by what we find beautiful. How do we recognize love? How do we corral desire, honoring some forms of its expression and restricting others? Our marriage traditions, along with our extended kinship networks, used to offer models beautiful enough to inspire sacrifice. An approach which focuses solely on the economics of sex and procreation can do some good, but—as *Red Families* unfortunately proves—it can't comprehend the full range of human motives. ♦

B&A

Queen of Hearts

The life and times of a royal icon.

BY EDWARD SHORT

In *Brideshead Revisited* Anthony Blanche warns Charles Ryder against what he calls "simple, creamy English charm" because, as he says, "Charm is the great English blight. . . . It spots and kills anything it touches. It kills love; it kills art." This was certainly not the case with Elizabeth (1900-2002), the consort of George VI and mother of Elizabeth II, whose charm profoundly endeared her to her subjects. It also suffuses this admirable new biography, which chronicles how Elizabeth's Edwardian upbringing formed not only her strong, resilient, dutiful character but her abounding sense of fun.

The Queen Mother
The Official Biography
by William Shawcross
Knopf, 1,120 pp., $40

Elizabeth Angela Marguerite Bowes-Lyon, the ninth of the Earl of Strathmore's 10 children, was born on August 4, 1900, at the family home of St. Paul's Walden Bury, near Hitchin, Hertfordshire, though the failure of her father to register a birth certificate gave rise to speculation that she might actually have been delivered in a horse-drawn ambulance in Mayfair. The Bowes were a raffish lot: spendthrift, hard-drinking, and mad for horses. One of her 18th-century ancestors, known as Stoney Bowes, was

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described by a contemporary as "surely the lowest cad in history. . . . He was the type of seedy, gentlemanly bounder. . . . He was cunning, ruthless, sadistic, with rat-like cleverness and a specious Irish charm. He was a fortune hunter of the worst type." Doubtless it was this louche ancestry that gave Elizabeth so much of her own delight in the turf, strong drink, and the society of courtiers.

Her father Lord Glamis, later the Earl of Strathmore, was educated at Eton and served in the Life Guards. A philoprogenitive, humorous man, he was particularly fond of his daughter, who reciprocated, a governess recalled, by "always looking round to see if he wanted anything—and lighting his cigarettes." Her devout mother Cecilia Cavendish Bentinck was the great-granddaughter of the Duke of Portland, who was twice prime minister in George III's reign. After her clergyman father died when she was just shy of three, Cecilia lived with her mother in Florence. Some of Elizabeth's fondest childhood memories were of days spent with her mother in various Italian villas.

Like most upper-class Georgian women, Elizabeth was educated at home by governesses. When not putting those governesses through their paces, she formed her lifelong love of horses. It was also as a girl that she acquired her voracious appetite. Years later, when recovering from a bout of flu in Buckingham Palace, she wrote Princess Elizabeth

> I am . . . still a little achy, and still living on tea! I hope by tomorrow that I shall be eating Irish stew, steak & kidney pudding, haricot mutton, roast beef, boiled beef, sausages & mutton pies, not to mention roast chicken, fried chicken, boiled chicken, scrambled chicken, scrunched up chicken, good chicken, nasty chicken, fat chicken, thin chicken, any sort of chicken.

During her childhood, Elizabeth formed an inseparable bond with her brother David, later the godfather of Princess Margaret, who confided to her sister after the death of George VI that it had been he who encouraged the stammering Duke of York to pursue her before they married. In a letter divulging his long-kept secret, David explained that he was only breaking his silence "because in Your Majesty's terrible loneliness I believe that it may bring one tiny grain of comfort."

Queen Elizabeth and King George VI during the Blitz, 1940

CENTRAL PRESS / GETTY IMAGES

Another David, Lord David Cecil, the biographer of Lord Melbourne who was so instrumental in the education of Queen Victoria, recalled Elizabeth as a child:

> I turned and looked and was aware of a small, charming rosy face around which twined and strayed rings and tendrils of silken hair, and a pair of dewy grey eyes. . . . From that moment my small damp hand clutched at hers and I never left her side. . . . Forgotten were all the pretenders to my heart. Here was the true heroine.

Cecil would be the first of Elizabeth's many literary friends, who would later include the Sitwells, John Betjeman, Noel Coward, and Ted Hughes.

On her fourteenth birthday, when the First World War broke out, Elizabeth lay in bed listening to jubilant crowds making their way up the Mall towards Buckingham Palace. "The streets were full of people shouting, roaring, yelling their heads off," she recalled, "little thinking what was going to happen." After war was declared, Glamis Castle was converted into an army hospital and the Edwardian idyll that had been Elizabeth's childhood came to an end. It was during these unforgettable war years that Elizabeth acquired her lifelong respect for soldiers. Later, before World War II, she was visiting the Black Watch at their barracks in Perth and noticed her nephew John Elphinstone among the officers.

"It gave me such a shock to see John in his Black Watch uniform," she confided to Queen Mary, "for he suddenly looked exactly like my brother Fergus who was killed at Loos, & in the same regiment. It was uncanny in a way, & desperately sad to feel that all that ghastly waste was starting again at the bidding of a lunatic."

William Shawcross nicely sums up the impact of the First World War on Elizabeth: "She had acquired, through her experience of the suffering of family, friends, and soldiers from all over the world, an understanding of pain, and of the difficulties of others, which served her and her country well in the years to come." If, towards the end of her life, she was often called the last of the Edwardians, she was careful to remind her countrymen that there were aspects of the Edwardian age worth preserving.

Elizabeth's marriage to George V's diffident second son, Prince Albert,

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proved deeply happy. Unsure at first whether she could adapt to her new role as Duchess of York, she eventually succeeded simply by making the role her own. As one admirer told another biographer: "Her charm was indescribable. . . . She was also very kind and compassionate. And she could be very funny—which was rare in those circles. She was a wag." Before accepting Prince Albert's third proposal, she received two from other beaux. Even George V, a morbidly implacable man, had to admit that "Bertie is a lucky fellow."

If her marriage was unexpected, her husband's accession to the throne was even more so. In this, Elizabeth sharply differed from Queen Mary, whose marriage to George V was meticulously plotted. No one, least of all Elizabeth herself, planned to make Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon Queen of England. Edward VIII thrust the throne on her and her husband after Stanley Baldwin insisted that he either dump Wallis Simpson or abdicate. When he abdicated, Elizabeth's life was changed forever. Shawcross adroitly re-creates the day-to-day drama of the abdication crisis.

Soon after George VI ascended the throne, war broke out. When he and his queen consort visited the bomb-battered streets of London, there was nothing factitious about their empathy. "I'm glad we've been bombed," the queen assured a policeman after Buckingham Palace had been hit. "It makes me feel I can look the East End in the face." The sentence has been quoted a million times and still gets to the very heart of why Elizabeth was such a good queen.

Throughout the war, George VI and Elizabeth rallied the home front by visiting towns and cities bombed by the Luftwaffe and refusing to leave London. They also refused to have the princesses, Elizabeth and Margaret, removed to Canada. Hitler thought Queen Elizabeth "the most dangerous woman in Europe," and when England stood alone against the full fury of Hitler's bombers, she responded to a letter of sympathy from Eleanor Roosevelt with a letter of her own.

> Sometimes one's heart seems near breaking under the stress of so much sorrow and anxiety. When we think of our gallant young men being sacrificed to the terrible machine that Germany has created, I think that anger perhaps predominates. But when we think of their valour, their determination and their grave spirit, pride and joy are uppermost. We are all prepared to sacrifice everything in the fight to save freedom, and the curious thing is, that already many false values are going, and life is becoming simpler and greater every day.

At a time when Great Britain's survival was in question, George VI proved a capable king—though much of the credit for his success, as Shawcross shows, was due to his good, brave, loving wife. Elizabeth assumed her regal role with ready poise and became an admirable consort. She was also a good mother, rearing her daughters in the same Christian principles in which she had been reared. When George VI died in 1952 at 56 from lung cancer, the queen wrote her brother David: "Things can never be the same again without his energy & fun & goodness & kindness. He really was the kindest and most selfless person I have ever known." And after Edith Sitwell sent her some poems by George Herbert, she wrote back: "How small and selfish is sorrow. But it bangs one about until one is senseless, and I can never thank you enough for giving me such a delicious book wherein I found so much beauty and hope."

If she was often called the last of the Edwardians, she was careful to remind her countrymen that there were aspects of the Edwardian age worth preserving.

Once her daughter ascended the throne, Queen Elizabeth played her new role of Queen Mother with zest. It was Winston Churchill who convinced her that she must continue to play a national, indeed an international, role. In addition to becoming a symbol of enduring tradition, she became a perennial favorite of the Commonwealth, especially Canada, where she made 13 visits. Like Churchill, she was an unrepentant imperialist and watched with dismay as Robert Mugabe despoiled Rhodesia. At home, she was never convinced of the benefits of socialism. "I am extremely Anti-Labour," she told one friend. As Shawcross rightly points out, "It was an intuitive antipathy, a sense . . . that socialism sought to drag everything down into uniform and unimaginative drabness and political humbug."

That the Queen Mother regularly overdrew her account at Coutts Bank was proof of more than her extravagance; she was unstintingly generous to friends in straits. When one, D'Arcy Osborne, became hard up in old age, she wrote him from Clarence House: "D'Arcy, one or two of our old & loving friends have sent a small sum to your banking account in Rome, in case it might come in handy some time." To which the old man replied: "Dear Ma'am, How KIND!" Her munificence would allow him to take taxis and give him "the invaluable benefit of peace of mind and freedom from fussing over small and ignoble matters." What greater gift could any queen bestow?

Elizabeth never granted interviews to newspapers. She agreed with Walter Bagehot that "above all things our royalty is to be reverenced, and if you begin to poke about it you cannot reverence it. . . . Its mystery is its life. We must not let in daylight upon magic." In this long but engaging book, Shawcross emulates his subject's reserve—saying nothing, for example, of the more lurid aspects of the recent Windsors, only remarking: "There were some in the Royal Household who wished Queen Elizabeth would give [the Prince of Wales] robust advice. But that was not her style. She never liked to acknowledge, let alone confront, disagreeableness within the family. It was a characteristic which had earned her the nickname 'imperial ostrich.'" Here, again, she proved the quintessential Edwardian. ♦

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B&A

Laughing Detective

Charlie Chan and his creator get a scholarly makeover.

BY JON L. BREEN

In the 1920s, by our standards, America was a racist land. The image of the Chinese, who were explicitly excluded from immigration, was defined in fiction and media by sinister villains, comic servants, and laundrymen. A popular writer from Ohio introduced a character who would be loved by millions while giving the lie to every negative cliché about the Chinese. For his trouble, he would be posthumously reviled by some Asian Americans as a pernicious racist, and his creation as an undesirable stereotype. Over the years, many non-Asian defenders have protested this unfairness, but in the end, only a Chinese scholar could definitively set the record straight about Earl Derr Biggers and Charlie Chan.

Charlie Chan
The Untold Story of the Honorable Detective and His Rendezvous with American History
by Yunte Huang
Norton, 354 pp., $26.95

Making the Detective Story American
Biggers, Van Dine and Hammett and the Turning Point of the Genre, 1925-1930
by J.K. Van Dover
McFarland, 231 pp., $35

Biggers (1884-1933) wrote six novels about the Honolulu policeman Chan, from *The House Without a Key* (1925) to *Keeper of the Keys* (1932). Between 1926 and 1949, Chan would be a character in 47 films, including two silents and one early talkie in which he was reduced to a minor role. In the 44-film Chan series, he would be played by three actors—most definitively Warner Oland, most frequently by Sidney Toler, least notably by Roland Winters—who had one significant feature in common: none was Asian, or Asian American. This fact was the principal reason for Asian-American hostility to Charlie Chan.

Chinese student Yunte Huang came to the United States in 1991, terminally disillusioned about his country's future after the Tiananmen Square massacre. He landed in Buffalo for graduate study in English and worked as a delivery boy for a Chinese restaurant. After finding a two-volume omnibus of the Chan novels at an estate sale, he became "an avid fan" of both the books and the movies. Now a professor of English at the University of California at Santa Barbara, he writes eloquent English prose without a hint that it is his second language.

His book is really a triple biography: of Chang Apana, the Honolulu cop considered to have inspired the creation of Chan; of Biggers; and of the character himself in his literary and cinematic incarnations. Along the way, Huang touches on the history of Hawaii and the Chinese in America, depictions of Chinese in American literature (with special attention to Sax Rohmer's notorious villain Dr. Fu Manchu), the place of Asians in the silent film industry, including the careers of Sessue Hayakawa and Anna May Wong, and Hawaii's notorious 1932 Massie-Fortescue murder trial, in which Clarence Darrow's inability to get the seven Caucasian jurors to vote to acquit his white defendants is used to illustrate the complexity of Hawaiian race relations, and to prove that not all *haoles* (whites) were racist.

Earl Derr Biggers owed much of his success as a professional writer to his deep affinity with the popular tastes of his time. In his Harvard days, he was notorious for preferring contemporaries such as Richard Harding Davis, Franklin P. Adams, and Rudyard Kipling to the canon of literary classics. A native of Warren, Ohio, Biggers was a Boston journalist and drama critic before establishing himself as a writer of plays and popular fiction in the decade of World War I. His 1913 novel *Seven Keys to Baldpate* was adapted for the stage by George M. Cohan. By the 1920s, delicate health and a desire to break into screenwriting brought Biggers and his family to California, where he would live the remainder of his life. During a trip to Hawaii, he devised the basic plot of *The House Without a Key*, which was not intended to be the beginning of a series. Indeed, Charlie Chan was not even the main character. But the Chinese-American cop captured the public fancy, proving Biggers so understood his audience that he could achieve major success by the counterintuitive introduction of a sympathetic character from a generally despised population. Biggers would concentrate his literary efforts on the Honolulu sleuth until his death.

Though Biggers has never been the subject of a book-length biography, the two most extensive treatments of his life coincidentally have appeared in the same year. J.K. Van Dover's *Making the Detective Story American* discusses Biggers alongside S.S. Van Dine (Willard Huntington Wright) and Dashiell Hammett as the three key figures in the development of the American detective story in the late 1920s. Since Van Dine and Hammett had been the subject of book-length biographies, the largest section of Van Dover's biographical appendix covers Biggers, with many details of the author's career beyond those included by Huang. Between Huang and Van Dover, readers can get an excellent summary of Biggers's contribution to American popular fiction and his ultimate achievement in creating an immortal character who has served to bridge cultures rather than separate them.

Biggers was famously inspired to create Charlie Chan after seeing the newspaper account of an arrest by two Honolulu police sergeants, Chang Apana and the less euphoniously named Lee Fook. Charlie Chan was already famous by the time Biggers and Chang first met in 1928, so saying the character was

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based on Chang Apana is a bit of stretch. Chang, a fine man and a highly effective policeman, was more like a contemporary action hero than a cerebral sleuth, closer to Jackie Chan than Charlie. Thin and wiry, he struck fear into desperadoes with the bullwhip he carried. In his use of disguise, often as a "See Yup Man," or street peddler, he bore more resemblance to Sherlock Holmes or Mr. Moto. Rather than specializing in murder investigation, Chang had a variety of jobs in his police career, including a stint as a "humane officer," enforcing animal cruelty laws. Illiterate in both Chinese and English, he communicated in pidgin English, which Charlie Chan emphatically did not.

It is true, as Huang asserts, that Charlie Chan was a purely American creation, no more authentically Chinese than chop suey or fortune cookies, but he reflected many admirable characteristics of his countrymen and does not deserve to be a front-and-center symbol of racism. Huang quotes Frank Chin, "probably the most articulate and forceful" of Chan's Asian-American detractors, describing Biggers as "the reincarnation of an antebellum southern cracker overseer sitting on the verandah, sippin' his mint julep, listening to the happy darkies choppin cotton in the fields making racial harmony … sitting on the lanai, sippin' his mai tai." Chin also pairs Chan with Fu Manchu as "visions of the same mythic being, brewed up in the subconscious regions of the white Christian's racial wet dream." Chin's ultimate charge is that Chan represents Christian efforts to convert the Chinese—which is odd, since I don't recall any overt religious references in the character on screen or page.

Huang gives Chin his due, but exposes the defamation of Biggers and Chan in his discussion of the main charges against the character, none of which is persuasive. With his huge family of children, Chan could hardly be effeminate or asexual. Courteous without ever being a doormat, he is certainly not accurately described as obsequious or subservient. In the six novels, Chan does all his investigating in Hawaii, in Northern California, or on shipboard between the two. On screen, though, he would become a world traveler, solving cases in New York, Paris, London, Egypt, Monte Carlo, Panama, and Berlin at the time of the 1936 Olympics. Contrary to legend, the first actors to play him on film were Asian: George Kuwa in *The House Without a Key* (1926), Kamiyama Sojin in *The Chinese Parrot* (1927), and E.L. Park in *Behind That Curtain* (1929). But none of these was the star of the film in which he appeared, and none of them returned to the role.

Keye Luke, Warner Oland, 1937

JOHN SPRINGER COLLECTION / CORBIS

The first starring Chan was Warner Oland, a Swedish actor who had made something of a specialty of playing Asian roles, including the dreaded Fu Manchu. He needed little specialized makeup to look Chinese and he immersed himself in the role, studying Chinese culture and sometimes playing the Chan character offscreen as well as on. He established a unique chemistry with studio artist-turned-actor Keye Luke, who played Number One Son Lee. Luke, who would become one of the most prominent and successful Asian-American performers on stage and screen, understandably was one of the most outspoken defenders of the Charlie Chan character. After the death of Warner Oland, the role of Chan was recast and Luke chose to leave the series as well.

Both of the major screen Chans were versatile and accomplished theatrical professionals. Oland was a friend of August Strindberg, some of whose plays he and his wife translated into English. His successor Sidney Toler, an older man, was a prolific writer, composer, and producer as well as actor. Toler required more makeup and took a somewhat different approach to the role: Where Oland had been lovable and avuncular, Toler was more wisecrackingly acerbic. Number Two Son Jimmy, played by Sen Yung, was less capable and used more for comic relief than Keye Luke's Number One, giving Toler a lot to be acerbic about.

One oddity of Huang's excellent and balanced treatment is his insistence that Charlie Chan spoke pidgin English. True, Chan had some grammatical problems peculiar to second language learners. His very first recorded speech confuses verb agreement: "No knife are present in neighborhood of crime." He often left out initial articles, which do not exist in the Chinese language. But pidgin is defined by the Oxford Concise Dictionary as "a simplified language containing vocabulary from two or more languages, used for communication between people not having a common language." From the beginning, Chan has no problem being understood by English speakers. His vocabulary is rich and extensive; the words he uses to communicate are entirely English and carefully chosen for both beauty and precision.

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Ironically, some of Huang's own examples demonstrate this and demolish the pidgin charge: "The man who is about to cross a stream should not revile the crocodile's mother." By what definition can that be called pidgin? Only in *The Chinese Parrot* (1927), undercover as a Chinese servant, does Chan deign to speak pidgin English, and even then is determined not to say "velly." By *Keeper of the Keys*, the last novel in the series, his language, though colorful and elaborate as ever, is hardly distinguishable grammatically from that of other educated speakers.

If Chan did not speak pidgin English, a more interesting question remains: Did anybody ever really talk like that? Biggers had an answer, according to J.K. Van Dover. In a 1929 letter to a friend in Hawaii, he expressed himself, "sorry if Honolulu is still distressed by Charlie's way of putting things. . . . [I]f he talked good English, as he naturally would, he would have no flavor, and if he talked pidgin, no mainland reader would tolerate him for one chapter." Instead, he based Chan's speaking style on letters from his Chinese cook and other Chinese writers of English as a second language, which he found "flowery, elegant . . . [with] some amazing turns of phrase."

Several years after the end of the Chan film series, Peter Ustinov took on the role in a not especially good spoof called *Charlie Chan and the Curse of the Dragon Queen* (1981). The most memorable, and perhaps best, scene takes place in a movie theater in Chinatown where a deadly accurate black-and-white pastiche of a Chan film is on the screen and a crowd of Chinese Americans watch with rapt attention and obvious hero worship. At the time the film appeared, it seemed clear this was intended as a joke: The demonization of Chan by Asian-American social critics was well underway, and some devotees of his adventures were coming to regard them as a guilty pleasure.

The depiction of Asians as admiring Charlie Chan was certainly intended ironically; but judging from the testimony of Yunte Huang, it may have been more accurate than anyone realized. ♦

B&A

Thursday's Father

The cosmos in the mind of G.K. Chesterton.

BY DAWN EDEN

It is said that the study of metaphysics is dying because people no longer want to study things that cannot be changed. One sees this in the popularity of the Serenity Prayer, in which the thing most feared is not, as with the Lord's Prayer, the temptation to sin, but rather the inability to control one's circumstances: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change."

G.K. Chesterton
Theologian
by Aidan Nichols
Second Spring, 240 pp., $19.95

Had G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936) lived to read the Serenity Prayer (it emerged shortly after his death), he would have found it ironic that the orison earned fame as the mantra of the recovery movement. Coming of age in an era when preening poets went Wilde wearing carnations the color of the bilious liquor they imbibed, Chesterton recognized early on that the true subversion was sanity. "Revolt in the abstract is—revolting," says his protagonist Gabriel Syme in *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1907). "It's mere vomiting. . . . The most poetical thing in the world is not being sick."

Such an appreciation of the artfulness of "things going right" characterizes the brand of metaphysical realism that Aidan Nichols, the English Dominican priest and prolific author, identifies as central to Chesterton's worldview. In *G.K. Chesterton, Theologian*, he traces the origins of that realism back to the literary giant's personal background and his reactions to the leading cultural figures of his time. Nichols's Thomistic talent for systematizing leads him to find connections between Chesterton's use of paradox, his demonstration of God's existence (the "argument from joy"), his understanding of man as *imago dei*, and his Christology.

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While his subject has been called The Apostle of Common Sense, Nichols stresses that "metaphysical realism is not merely the upshot of a common-sense epistemology." It is also "the fruit of the doctrine of creation, which declares things to be intelligibly planned by the divine mind who called them 'good.'" As Chesterton wrote in a 1910 essay,

> The primordial things—existence, energy, fruition—are good so far as they go. . . . The ordinary modern progressive position is that this is a bad universe, but will certainly get better. I say it is certainly a good universe, even if it gets worse.

From this core philosophy, Chesterton, in his 1908 classic *Orthodoxy*, was able to critique the "madness" of his "thoroughly worldly" contemporaries. Their errors stemmed not from irrationality but rather from the narrowness of the data they admitted into the realm of reason, as Nichols observes:

> Within their own limited terms of reference, lunatics are often cogently rational. . . . Chesterton takes the mark of madness to be the "combination between a logical completeness and a spiritual contraction." Madmen are in "the clean and well-lit prison of one idea."

In modern terms, he saw the prominent scientific rationalists of his day, as well as modernist Christians ("new theologians [who] dispute original sin"), as conspiracy theorists—the intelligentsia's equivalent of the black-helicopter/tinfoil-hat crowd. While his arrows were aimed at contemporaries such as George

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Bernard Shaw and Ernst Haeckel, one does not have to look far to find modern-day examples of the blinkered mindset he describes: Witness Richard Dawkins saying that he would cling to his nonbelief in God even if it meant having to posit that an outer-space alien designed human life. Chesterton is seen by many as an answer to such New Atheists because, in Nichols's words, "metaphysical realism, as an account of cosmic order hospitable to the Christian doctrine of creation, can improve on the materialist account: Whereas Christians are free to believe that there are large areas of 'settled order and inevitable development' in the universe, materialists, Chesterton points out, cannot allow the slightest incursion of spirit or miracle."

Still, despite the New Atheists' media stardom, the most popular modern heresy, at least in terms of book sales, is not materialism but solipsism—the Me-centered philosophy of Oprah, Chopra, *The Secret*, etc. While New Atheists see the New Age movement as merely a subset of religious superstition, Chesterton saw the solipsism of his day—and the Kantian subjective turn that provided it with its pseudo-philosophical ground—as the flipside of materialism. The two "have something in common," Nichols writes, quoting from *Orthodoxy*: "The man who cannot believe his senses, and the man who cannot believe anything else, are both insane, but their insanity is proved not by any error in their argument, but by the manifest mistake of their whole lives."

One is reminded of the solipsistic science-fiction author Philip K. Dick who, when asked by a college student in 1972 to give a definition of reality, gave a purely negative reply: "Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away." By contrast, Chesterton counters both the narrow negativism of solipsism and the equally narrow perspective of what modern materialists call the "reality-based community," as he insists "reason is itself a matter of faith."

Nichols explains, "Naturally, by 'faith' here Chesterton doesn't mean specifically Christian faith. He is speaking of a philosophical faith grounding confidence in the fundamental reliability of the human mind and its most refined instrument, which is language." Both materialists and solipsists share an odd collective aphasia. In their refusal to accept the Word that transcends everything men can know, they deny the means by which men can know anything.

Nichols details how Chesterton's desire to harmonize faith and reason eventually led him to St. Thomas Aquinas. His 1933 biography of the saint "follows the movement of Thomas's own thought as it finds in the finite being presented through the senses a way to the fontal being which pours itself out in all that is." But Aquinas was more than a philosopher; he was also a mystic. Chesterton understood him because he shared his sense of the numinous. An analysis of Chesterton's mystical insights would support Nichols's assertions that his theology speaks to today's Christians.

G.K. Chesterton, ca. 1920

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Nichols, however, is by his own admission "not . . . a mystic," and this limitation occasionally leads him to an un-Chestertonian closed-mindedness. For example, he omits any mention of the 1907 "Introduction to the Book of Job"—the closest Chesterton ever came to biblical exegesis. Likewise, he gives short shrift to his subject's most profound novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, a work whose theme of theodicy built upon the points Chesterton made in his Job essay—particularly his observation that "the riddles of God are more satisfying than the solutions of man." In his curt comments on *Thursday*, Nichols claims,

> The key to that novel is that the men who represent cosmic order in society are pursued, harried, by those who suppose them to be really anarchists. In this way, the representatives of order who police the world for its health and safety are able to bear witness that they too have suffered, and this gives them a moral cachet in the eyes of all who consider themselves the victims of order.

But that is not quite true. The sufferings of the policemen in *Thursday* are not for the purpose of giving them cachet in the eyes of the story's lone "real anarchist," Lucian Gregory. Rather, they exist so that the believer might use his God-given free will to unite himself to Christ, whose victory comes through suffering, and thereby reject the lies of the original anarchist, for whom the similarly named Lucian is a mere stand-in.

Nichols's avoiding extended analysis of *Thursday* is all the more strange because the book's true message actually affirms his grammar of Chesterton's theology. In fact, *G.K. Chesterton, Theologian* is extraordinarily valuable precisely because Nichols's grammar, applied to *Thursday*, not only brings the novel into fuller focus, but also reveals the prophetic quality of Chesterton's religious understanding. For example, he rightly draws the reader's attention to the way Chesterton marries his metaphysical realism to his appreciation of symbol as "an equally far-reaching way of displaying what is involved in the real." In *The Everlasting Man*, Nichols writes, "the Incarnation of the Word makes possible precisely such a union . . . [linking] a

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universal philosophy that abstracts from concrete things in the search for general and underlying structures, on the one hand, and on the other, a mythopoetic imagination that discerns divine presence and action as the matrix of the most important concrete things."

Such an observation adds depth to the epiphany of the *Thursday* protagonist Gabriel Syme, who intuits that all visible creation is sacramental—real in itself, yet symbolic of an invisible reality that is personal:

> "Listen to me," cried Syme with extraordinary emphasis. "Shall I tell you the secret of the whole world? It is that we have only known the back of the world. We see everything from behind, and it looks brutal. That is not a tree, but the back of a tree. That is not a cloud, but the back of a cloud. Cannot you see that everything is stooping and hiding a face? If we could only get round in front—"

This message is far more pertinent to *Thursday* than Nichols's purported "key to that novel." Omitting it, he misses an opportunity to show how Chesterton presages the similarly sacramental account of creation that Pope John Paul II would give more than 70 years later in his addresses on the "theology of the body."

In "the mystery of creation," John Paul said, the world began "by the will of God, who is omnipotence and love. Consequently, every creature bears within it the sign of the original and fundamental gift." In a joyful paradox that would not be out of place in *Orthodoxy*, the pope adds that this gift is centered upon man: "Man appears in creation as the one who received the world as a gift, and it can also be said that the world received man as a gift."

Despite overlooking this affinity between Chesterton and John Paul, Nichols's grammar leads to a deeper understanding of both. He highlights a passage from *Orthodoxy* describing how "all creation is separation": "It was the prime philosophic principle of Christianity that this divorce in the divine act of making . . . was the true description of the act whereby the absolute energy made the world." John Paul drew upon the same point in his theology of the body to show how, in the Genesis creation accounts, man's ability to give himself in love is contingent upon his realization of his "original solitude"—the "separation" of which Chesterton speaks, which, in the late pope's words, "permits him to be the author of genuinely human activity."

The first man's recognition of his solitude is linked, John Paul says, with his recognition of his "dependence in existing" in which he faces, for the first time, the "alternative between death and immortality." For Chesterton, such "isolation" marks the "root horror" endured by *Thursday*'s Syme. As John Paul notes, however, it is only through recognizing one's self as having a separate identity that true interpersonal communion is possible: "In this solitude, [man] opens up to a being akin to himself."

Here too, Chesterton seems to be completing John Paul's sentences, as he writes of Syme's joy in discovering that one of his seeming enemies is actually a fellow policeman: "There are no words to express the abyss between isolation and having one ally. It may be conceded to the mathematicians that four is twice two. But two is not twice one; two is two thousand times one." But Chesterton's next line in some sense even surpasses John Paul because it shows what he had that the theology of the body, for all its genius, utterly lacked—humor: "That is why, in spite of a hundred disadvantages, the world will always return to monogamy."

Shortly before his death, Chesterton wrote that one of his favorite tributes came from a thoroughly secular psychoanalyst who told him, "I know a number of men who nearly went mad, but were saved because they had really understood *The Man Who Was Thursday*." There's serenity for you. ♦

B&A

Yankee Go Home

The Ugly American is alive and well and working for peace. **BY LAUREN WEINER**

What better way is there to see into our national character than to follow some callow Americans as they go among foreigners? Armed with our Yankee pragmatism and idealism, our earnestness, pluck, and love of the underdog, we manage to get ourselves in some interesting scrapes out there.

Eating with the Enemy
How I Waged Peace with North Korea from My BBQ Shack in Hackensack
by Robert Egan and Kurt Pitzer
St. Martin's, 400 pp., $25.99

Gringo Nightmare
A Young American Framed for Murder in Nicaragua
by Eric Volz
St. Martin's, 304 pp., $25.99

Robert "Bobby" Egan burned with a desire to change the world precisely because he supported the underdog: namely, himself. This "kid from the wrong side of town" set about defanging the Democratic People's Republic of Korea so he could teach those elite experts in Washington what a North Jersey burger chef and high school dropout can accomplish when he tries. Thus, do we add him to the long line of American businessmen—Averell Harriman, say, or Armand Hammer—who have adorned themselves in the mantle of statesmen? Of course, when you do diplomacy all by yourself while holding down a full-time job as a restaurateur you don't try to compete with the State Department's outreach to front-rank countries. What Egan specialized in was chatting up representatives of isolated regimes—Vietnam, North Korea, and Saddam Hussein's Iraq—or, as he calls them,

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"a bunch of rejects, just like me." Not being on friendly terms with the United States, he says, means unpopularity in the diplomatic corps, "so when I come along with dinner plans and tickets to the game, it's tempting."

Why would one want to be "tempting" to tyrants? It's a long story, and one that defies some of our expectations. Peace activists tend to be flag-burning types, but not Egan. That is one reason why—aside from general peculiarity—it takes a while to wrap one's mind around the circumstances and motivations that led him to the exploits he claims in *Eating with the Enemy*, his memoir written with Kurt Pitzer. One piece of the puzzle is that the author was shut out of exciting ventures early in life. The mobsters in his neighborhood in North Jersey wouldn't let him in the Mafia (he's only half Italian) and then his youth kept him from getting drafted and sent to fight Communists in Vietnam. He attached himself to the POW/MIA movement as a way to compensate for missing out on the war and wangled a connection with H. Ross Perot and his coterie of ex-military men. Trying to rescue missing American servicemen in Indochina, a pursuit at once patriotic and counterintuitive, suited him.

It also gave him a taste for dabbling in international affairs. The United Nations headquarters was a convenient drive from his part of New Jersey, and he helped one Vietnamese official he met there to defect. The Vietnamese contacts petered out in the early 1990s—public interest in stranded GIs waned with the warming of U.S. relations with Vietnam—but those contacts had passed along his name to the North Koreans, who called him up in 1993. So he reactivated his private foreign service. Before long he was making trips to the Hermit Kingdom to promote trade with the United States. Sure, North Korea is a totalitarian dictatorship; that doesn't mean you can't josh with people to break the ice, as when Egan said to a wraithlike member of the starving populace: "You look like you need a good meal." The man responded: "You look like you ate my meal."

The motives driving this citizen diplomacy are expressed several different ways over the course of *Eating With the Enemy*. The psychological, the patriotic, and the financial get mixed together. Just when it occurs to us to doubt the author on whether there are any stranded POWs, living or dead, from the Korean War that he could rescue, he shifts to discussing other goals. These range from heading off nuclear war between the United States and North Korea, to promoting trade between the two countries, to making sure Bobby Egan is first in line to build a barbecue joint in Pyongyang when relations open up.

Naturally enough, his hobby attracted FBI surveillance, and Egan does not hide the fact that he enjoyed the attention. He checked in with U.S. authorities regularly, and if they couldn't stop him from taking his North Korean friends on hunting and fishing trips, or serving them free meals in his restaurant, they could at least debrief him about what these mysterious men were like. Once, one of the North Koreans posted to U.N. headquarters, a military man named Han, needed dental care. Egan, who had grown close to Han, found a good oral surgeon to treat him. Afterward, Egan delivered the extracted molar to FBI counterintelligence for DNA sampling. Han headed home when his tour of duty ended; it was awful, Egan writes, to have to say goodbye to "my best friend."

He also liked his second FBI handler. This spelled trouble for the handler, of course: When the young agent, succumbing to the Egan charm, tried to advance one of the Egan schemes—to have the United States purchase North Korea's nuclear program—the FBI demoted him. Any reader will pity those who cross the path of this "goombah" (his word) diplomat, from the National Security Council experts sent up from Washington to rein him in to the Pennsylvania state senator Egan took with him to Pyongyang to retrieve the rusting U.S.S. *Pueblo*. (The ship stayed firmly docked on the Taedong River. The North Koreans were only toying with Egan on that one. On most of the other stuff, too.)

Bobby Egan is an ingenuous man—perhaps not as ingenuous as he would like to seem—and his cockeyed-optimist act seems mostly intended to keep us off balance and wondering if he's kidding. His fighting-Stalinism-with-steaks approach did enable him to talk Pyongyang into sending a women's soccer team to a competition here. It was a mixed accomplishment, though: Try as he might, he was unable to land the players a commercial endorsement. Gatorade declined after mulling over Egan's idea for a TV commercial, which would have had a North Korean woman kicking a soccer ball and—to suggest how empowered she is by drinking Gatorade—making the kick look like a nuclear explosion.

As innocents abroad go, the author of *Gringo Nightmare* is, perhaps, less odd than Bobby Egan. Eric Volz is one of those Americans—our classic literature is full of them—who rub non-Americans the wrong way but don't realize this until it's too late. Being of partly Mexican ancestry and speaking excellent Spanish persuaded him that he was appealing to the villagers of San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua. To them, however, this Jeep-driving Californian was part of a growing foreign contingent that, amid the post-Sandinista development boom in Nicaragua, had intruded on their quiet life on the Pacific coast.

Volz had found San Juan del Sur in his student days, traveling the hemisphere in search of exotic places to go surfing. A Latin American studies major, he emerged from college with the pro-guerrilla biases one picks up in the academy. But he later came to believe that the best way to make a revolution in Central America was not through Marxism but the advancement of business. So he returned to San Juan del Sur in 2004, launching a bilingual magazine to promote "positive social change" while signing on with the local Century 21 office to sell real-estate to retirees from the United States. He had a romance with a local beauty named Doris Jiménez, a budding entrepreneur in her own right. Some in the town looked upon Volz "as too slick or ambitious," but then again, he writes, "the kind of work ethic that many Americans tend to admire is seen as extreme in other cultures."

Doris Jiménez was brutally raped and

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murdered in 2006. When tragedy struck, Volz prodded the police to get moving and track down her killer, but such treatment at the hands of an American surfer-turned-yuppie who had, until recently, been the victim's lover did not go over well. Before the sun had set on her funeral, Eric Volz was in handcuffs. His alibi—witnesses and phone records proving that he was far away in Managua when the crime took place—was ignored, and during his arraignment, while being walked from the jail to the courthouse, Volz was chased by a crowd screaming "Asesino!"

Anti-gringo sentiment in these parts of the world is nothing surprising, but putting a gringo in the dock came in especially handy for those arch anti-yanquis, the Sandinistas, who were just then staging a political comeback. Doris Jiménez's mother, a Sandinista loyalist, had the party's help in trucking in anti-Volz mobs to the various court proceedings, and from inside La Modelo, Nicaragua's maximum security prison, Volz watched on television as President Daniel Ortega was inaugurated.

"I don't think I ever felt my gringoness as strongly or as fearfully as I did on that day," he writes. Sandinista judges were a problem: At strategic points they would disappear on long vacations, dragging out the appeal of his 30-year prison sentence by several months. Even after his release was finally in the works, they outdid themselves by "losing" the Doris Jiménez case file. (It turned up a week later on the desk of a leftist appeals judge.) To counter the attacks in the Sandinista press, Volz's American-based legal team helped him secure the aid of important Nicaraguans, including a former leader of the contras.

There were many heroes, American and Nicaraguan, who helped bring about the reversal of his conviction and get him back home to the United States—especially the Nicaraguan judge Roberto Rodriguez, whose vote to reverse made him powerful enemies in the government and among Sandinista supporters. And Volz says that his sufferings—a year spent in mosquito-infested, dirty, and dangerous prison cells—have deepened him. Let us hope so. ♦

B&A

Richards Galore

Close encounters with the bad boys of cinema.

BY CYNTHIA GRENIER

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Richard Burton, Elizabeth Taylor, 1965

The chapter headings tell all you really need to know about this book: The Plastered Fifties, The Soused Sixties, The Sozzled Seventies, The Blotto Eighties, The Pickled Nineties. The final chapter is sadly and fittingly enough titled: Last Man Standing—referring, of course, to Peter O'Toole, the only survivor of these four highly talented and demon-accursed actors.

Hellraisers
The Life and Inebriated Times of Richard Burton, Richard Harris, Peter O'Toole, and Oliver Reed
by Robert Sellers
St. Martin's, 286 pp., $25.99

I got to know some of these worthies in varying degrees of acquaintanceship during the sixties and seventies. The Burtons because some tax arrangement found them in Paris shooting *The Sandpiper*, supposedly situated in California, a film for which both stars had infinite contempt. At that time I wrote a column reviewing films and theater three times weekly in the *International Herald Tribune*. Burton read me, found he agreed mostly with what I had had to say, and began passing me scripts he was receiving practically every day to get my reactions.

Friendship with Elizabeth was slower to develop, but before long, we two females were merrily referring to "your Richard" and "my Richard" (Grenier). Our two Richards found quite a bit in common—apart from drink—and Burton wound up giving "my Richard" a very fine jacket blurb for his first novel, *Yes And Back Again*. (It was Elizabeth, however, who saw to it that her Richard's text got to the publishers on time.)

In passing, let me note that the author rather irritatingly keeps referring to Miss Taylor as "Liz," an appellation she never used herself, nor did she

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appreciate people addressing her thus. And in terms of the Burtons being heavy drinkers: Although her Richard, indeed, could consume a substantial amount of alcohol, in the two years that I spent a fair amount of time in his company, I never found him unable to recite verse, from Shakespeare to Dylan Thomas, other than clearly and flawlessly by the end of any long evening.

Those were merry days, in the early sixties, at the French film studios of Boulogne-Billancourt outside Paris. The Burtons were on one set; on another were Peter O'Toole, Peter Sellers, and Woody Allen shooting *What's New, Pussycat?* Burton and O'Toole, both very bright, engaging, and witty fellows, were something of a treat to spend time with.

Hellraisers concentrates on how four tremendously gifted men seemed hell-bent on self-destruction. It makes painful reading, recounting as it does one drunken pub crawl after another, followed by yet another marriage split apart, punctuated by the gradual sliding-down of their once glorious celebrity. The author makes no real effort to analyze the why or wherefore that drove these talented men to their relatively early deaths.

Oliver Reed's life is probably the most painful of all to follow. Slightly less known than the other three, he apparently was endowed with a singularly strong constitution that led him to the kind of excess that brought him to his demise at age 61. While making *Gladiator* in Malta, Reed whooped it up riotously with a group of young British sailors, matching and mastering them in bouts of arm-wrestling, drinking all the while. The sailors finally left, and Reed settled down on the tavern floor, falling asleep, never to wake. Director Ridley Scott, in a kind of tribute (at a cost of some $2 million to the budget), gave Reed's character a redeeming death onscreen, with the help of computer grafting.

My one encounter with Reed was on the set of Richard Lester's *The Three Musketeers*, where, fittingly enough, he was cast as Athos, the alcoholic nobleman with a secret past. There were no drinks, but we did have a long, thoughtful, intelligent, entertaining discussion—not of just the film, but of the French novelist Alexandre Dumas, the relationship of Athos and the young Gascon swashbuckler D'Artagnan (played in the film by Michael York, who is quoted sympathetically here), and what it was like working with Richard Lester as a director. Oliver Reed was both perceptive and wickedly entertaining.

I only met Richard Harris at the night of his triumph at the Cannes Film Festival where his performance in *This Sporting Life* would earn him the best actor award. That night the actor was high—ebullient, indeed—from the sheer charge of the cheering throngs. I do remember, however, his director Lindsay Anderson lying across the threshold to Harris's hotel room to block entrance to all the eager young women yearning to pay their respects, in person, to the actor.

Peter O'Toole, Last Man Standing, was delightful, witty, and charming—someone you would like to have as a friend. He certainly made life on any film set, to say nothing of a festival, a special pleasure. I see, looking through my files, that I once described O'Toole thus at a festival in Sicily:

> The O'Toole surface is light, rapid, entertaining, enthusiastic with quantities of beguiling, casual charm. He is an easy, almost incessant, talker, darting from reminiscence and anecdote to serious and well-thought-out intellectual judgments. Under the altogether engaging surface, though, one does sense now and then a rather considerable angst.

The last time I saw O'Toole was in a small café on Rue Washington in Paris, just around the corner from my apartment. It wasn't very late, maybe ten in the evening, and the place was deserted except for O'Toole. He was slumped down, his head on his arms on the table. He looked lonely and, well, miserable. Of course, I couldn't just say, "Well, hello, Peter. How about coming up to my place." Fortunately, his health is such nowadays that drink is no longer possible. Also, happily, he is still acting. Last Man Standing. ♦

B&A

Rough Cut

The movies and the Holocaust are an awkward fit.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

When it comes to the subject of the extermination of the Six Million, there are two kinds of people. First are those for whom the details of the Final Solution are a source of endless horrified fascination. And there are those for whom the mere thought of it provokes a visceral sensation akin to seasickness mixed with rage and for whom reading about or watching material relating to the Holocaust is close to unbearable. (There are others, of course, such as those who don't care and those who admire the Nazis, but we'll leave them out of it.)

A Film Unfinished
Directed by Yael Hersonski

As I grow older, I find myself more and more in the latter camp, though I was once very much in the former. The turning point came in the early 1990s, during a conversation with Anne and Jen, two fellow Washingtonians, in a convertible Mustang on the way to an Orioles game.

"Hey Jen," said Anne eagerly, "have you been to the Holocaust Museum yet?" It had just opened.

"No," Jen said. "How is it?"

"Out. Of. Control!"

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, *is* The Weekly Standard*'s movie critic.*

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"Wow!" Jen replied.

Anne had meant only that touring the museum had been a visceral experience for her. But the juxtaposition of the sentiment she had expressed, which could just as easily have been the words she would have spoken upon exiting her rollercoaster car at Space Mountain, and the beautiful scenery whipping around us on the Baltimore-Washington Parkway with the Holocaust itself, was profoundly disorienting for me.

How, after all, are we to understand, to take in, to manage the fact of this consuming event, very likely the worst in all of human history, in tandem with the rest of our lives—the beauty of a car ride, the thrill of youth speeding along in a convertible, the ineffable pleasure of a night game on a perfect summer eve? We can't, of course. So it's natural to convert the experience of learning about or talking about or reading about or watching things about the Holocaust to other, more familiar, more comprehensible experiences.

Thus, for my friend Anne, the museum intended to expose the enormity of the event was something like a rollercoaster. And so it is for cultural depictions as well. In 1978, when NBC aired its nine-and-a-half-hour miniseries on the Holocaust, *TV Guide* featured a summary of its third hour that went something like this: "Helena (Tovah Feldshuh) and Rudi (Joseph Bottoms) take time out to get married." Oh, how nice. They got to take time out from the Holocaust to get married. One could hardly have faulted *TV Guide* for this; if you make a miniseries about the Holocaust, it's going to be more a miniseries than it's going to be the Holocaust.

And what of documentaries about the Nazi extermination program? I just returned home from seeing one, from Israel, called *A Film Unfinished*. It's an original, provocative, and fascinating piece of work centering on a film crew sent by the Nazis into the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942 to take extensive footage of life inside the three-square-mile walled-off area inside the Polish capital into which Hitler's minions had crammed half a million Jews whom they then systematically proceeded to starve before systematically sending them off to their deaths later in the year in Treblinka.

The images recorded by the Nazi film crew, which were discovered a decade after the war in an East German vault, will be immediately familiar, because they have been duplicated in fictional renderings of the ghetto from *Schindler's List* to *The Pianist* to, yes, *Holocaust*. The director of *A Film Unfinished*, Yael Hersonski, explains in the narration that whatever purpose the Nazi propagandists had in mind, they abandoned, and the footage (on reels with the title "The Ghetto") was consigned to the vault.

Scene from the Warsaw Ghetto, 1941

GALERIE BILDERWELT / GETTY IMAGES

Hersonski then reveals that more footage was found—outtakes from "The Ghetto" cut because they feature mistakes in which other members of the film crew can be seen. What these reveal is the extent to which the events in "The Ghetto" were staged for the benefit of the cameras—in particular, a lavish funeral through the streets of Warsaw and the emptying of a prison.

Clearly, the propagandists in charge of the project had notions of using the footage for anti-Semitic purposes. They set up scenes of wealthier Warsaw Jews walking by starving beggars; dragged people into a Warsaw theater and made them clap and laugh on cue for 12 hours to show how much fun they were having (and God pity anyone who didn't laugh loud enough). But what the footage truly reveals, and the reason "The Ghetto" was surely abandoned, is the Holocaust in chrysalis: half a million people being purposefully starved to death.

Typhus-riddled children stagger through the streets on canes; Jews rifle through garbage in the dump in search of any scrap of food; a gigantic mountain of feces and garbage in an apartment courtyard is created by starving tenants throwing their trash from the windows because they no longer have the energy to bring it down on foot. And then there are the mass graves of people who have simply died on the streets, sent down a chute into a vast pit, and covered over with paper.

It's horrible to watch and, I suppose, a worthwhile reminder of the Final Solution. And yet there I was, in the Lincoln Plaza Cinema on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, holding a Diet Peach Snapple Iced Tea, feeling oddly virtuous because of the gasps that emerged from my mouth and the tears that sprang from my eyes—before I realized that I was reacting exactly as I did the previous week when I watched the horrific rape scene in the Swedish film *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* on my iPad on a flight from New York to Detroit.

Because, in the end, even a documentary about the Holocaust is a movie first and foremost, and has more in common with *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* than it does with the experience of the Six Million. It is Out. Of. Control. And that's the problem. Because the Holocaust was the evil opposite of Out. Of. Control. ♦

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"But while [Senator Michael Bennet] thanked Obama for his help in the summer, he may not want the president around for the general election in the fall. 'We'll have to see,' Bennet told ABC's Good Morning America*."*
—USA Today, *August 13, 2010*

PARODY

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Inbox (1,493)
Drafts
Sent items
Deleted Items (831)
Junk E-mail (736)
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Contacts
Masseuses
Suzan
Other

Inbox

Subject contains Search

From Subject

help me help you

From: President Barack Obama <bho@whitehouse.gov>
Date: Tuesday, August 24, 2010 1:39 PM
To: Hon. Michael Bennet (D-Colo.)
Subject: help me help you

Dear Senator Bennett:

How are you? How's your lovely wife and your three beautiful daughters? I hope this finds all of them well. Are you excited about your race? I sure am. And I love that fresh Rocky Mountain air. Gibbs tells me you seemed hesitant when Stephanopoulos recently asked you about my joining you on the campaign trail—you apparently said something like, "We'll have to see"?

I told Gibbs he was wrong to think you were dissing me. "Now why would my dear friend Tony Bennett do that to me, especially after all I've done for him?," I told Gibbs. I can't think of a bigger boost to your campaign than having me speak at your rallies. And though I am all over the country due to popular demand, I can happily tell you I've reserved a few weeks to help tip the scales in your favor.

Joe Biden just asked me who I admire the most in the Senate. I said it was you. You're well-mannered, thoughtful, punctual, nice. I like those qualities. See you soon!

Sincerely,
Barack H. Obama
The President of the United States

From: Rahm Emanuel (rahm@whiteh
Date: Monday, August 23, 2010 3:53
To: Hon. Michael Bennet (D-Colo)
Subject: I will hunt you down

Dear Loser:

"We'll have to see"?!? You little
and drive it all the way up your
begging for mercy. But mercy is
on fire til it burns to the ground
screaming in agony from the ex
like a little baby in diapers and
to live or die. The choice is your
and buried.

Yours,
Rahm

There are no pending schedules

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